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MARCH

Weird Tales

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"Lords of the Ghostlands"

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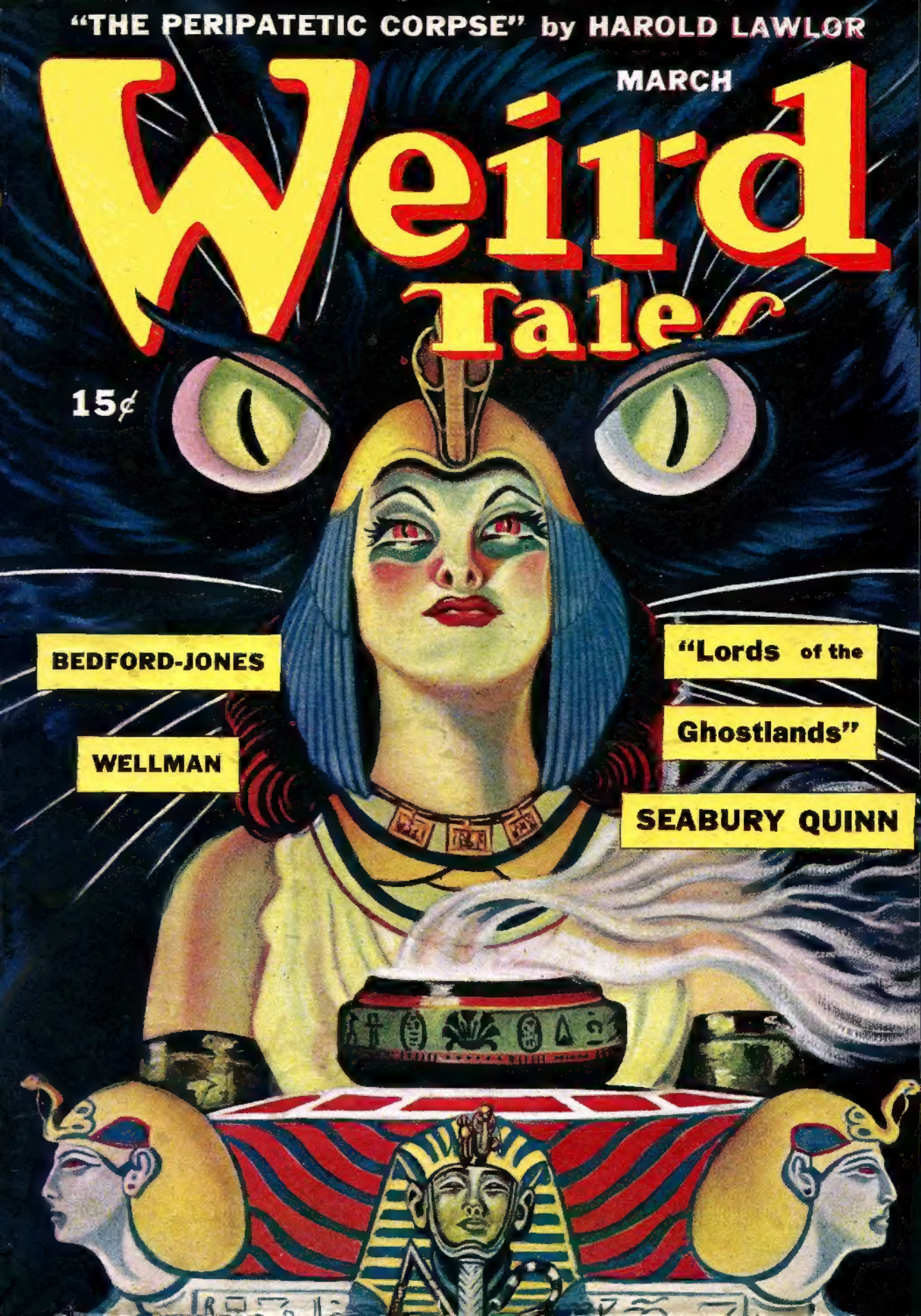

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Weird Tales

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NOVELETTE

LORDS OF THE GHOSTLANDS . . . . . **Seabury Quinn** **8**
To be jerked out of the quiet restfulness of your grave and shipped across four thousand miles of water . . . but then any mummy might be called unlucky!

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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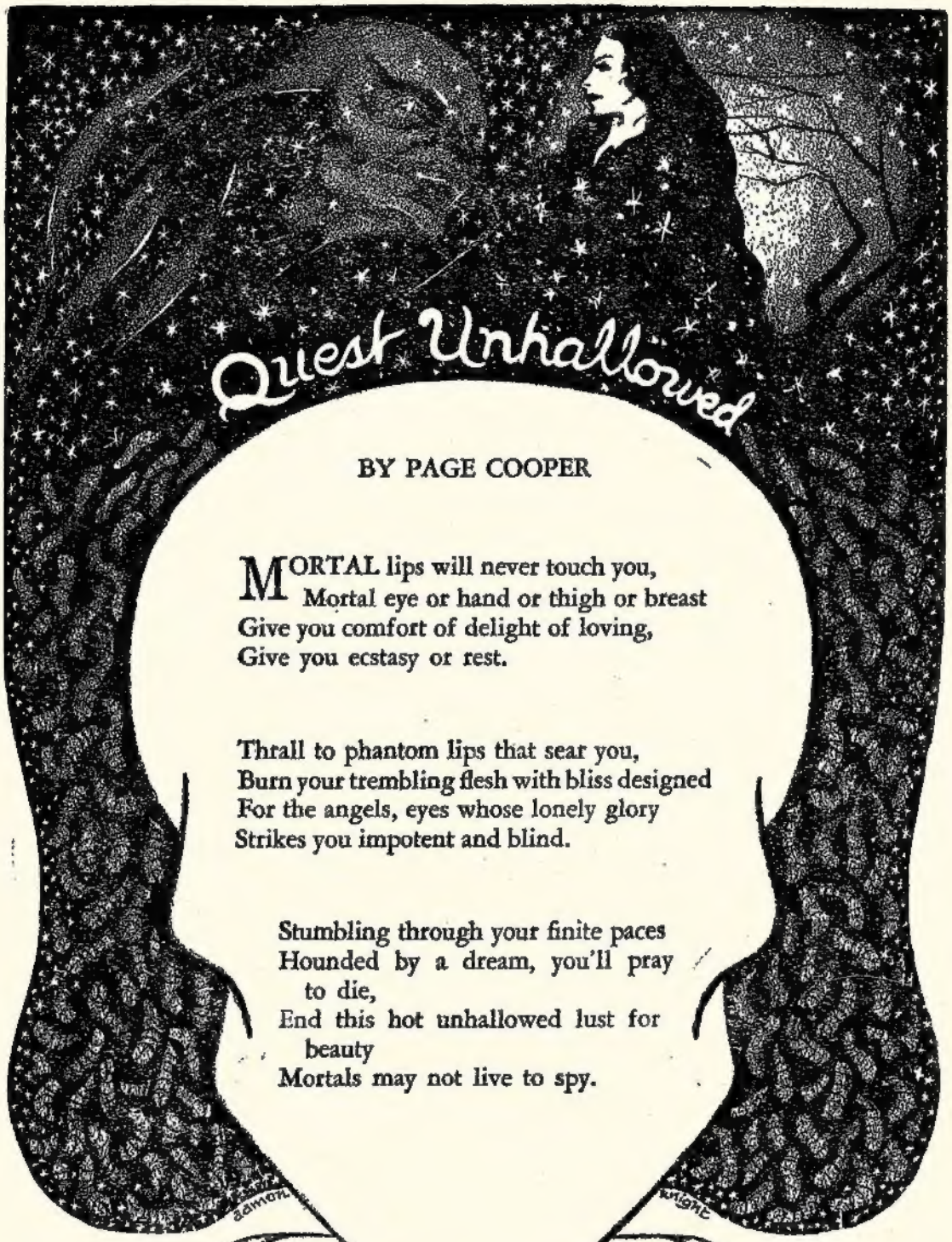

Quest Unhallowed

BY PAGE COOPER

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Mortal eye or hand or thigh or breast
Give you comfort of delight of loving,
Give you ecstasy or rest.

Thrall to phantom lips that sear you,
Burn your trembling flesh with bliss designed
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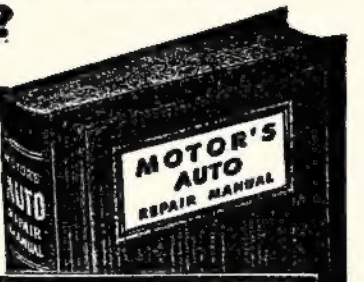

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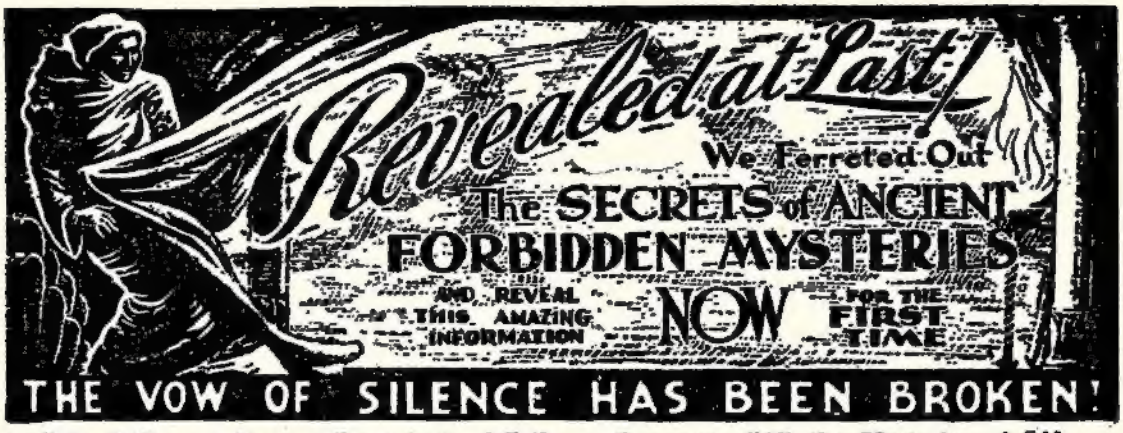

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Lords of the Ghostlands

JULES DE GRANDIN passed the brandy sniffer back and forth beneath his nose, savoring the bouquet of the *fine champagne* with the keen appreciation of a connoisseur. He took a light, preliminary sip, and his expression of delight became positively ecstatic. *"Parbleu,"* he murmured, "as my good friend François Rabelais was wont to say, 'Good wine is the living soul of the grape, but good brandy is the living spirit of the wine,' and—"

"The devil!" Dr. Taylor broke in as a nervous movement of his elbow dislodged the bubble-thin inhaler from the tabourette beside his elbow and sent it crashing to the floor.

"Quel dommage—what a pity!" consoled de Grandin. "To lose the lovely crystal is a misfortune, *Monsieur,* but the *vieux cognac,* he are priceless, to lose her are a calamity, no less!"

"You're not just saying that!" Dr. Taylor answered grimly. "That's the last bottle of Jérôme Napoleon in my cellar, and heaven only knows when I'll get a replacement. These things always seem to run in threes. This morning at breakfast I upset my coffee cup, this afternoon I nearly dropped a bit of absolutely priceless papyrus in the fire, now" —he broke off with a grimace of self-disgust—"I hope I've completed the cycle."

"One understands, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin nodded commiseratingly. "It is the times—the strain of war, the—"

"We can't blame this on the war," Taylor denied. "I hate to confess it, but I've been

---

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

By SEABURY QUINN

jumpy as a bit of popcorn in a popper for the past few days. My goat's gone."

"*Comment?*" de Grandin's brows went up the barest fraction of an inch. "He was a valuable animal, this goat of yours, *Monsieur?*"

Despite himself our host gave vent to a short laugh. "Very, Dr. de Grandin. Unless I get him back again I shall—oh, I'll not pull your leg. To lose one's goat is an American idiom meaning to become utterly demoralized. It's that dam' mummy that is driving me almost to distraction."

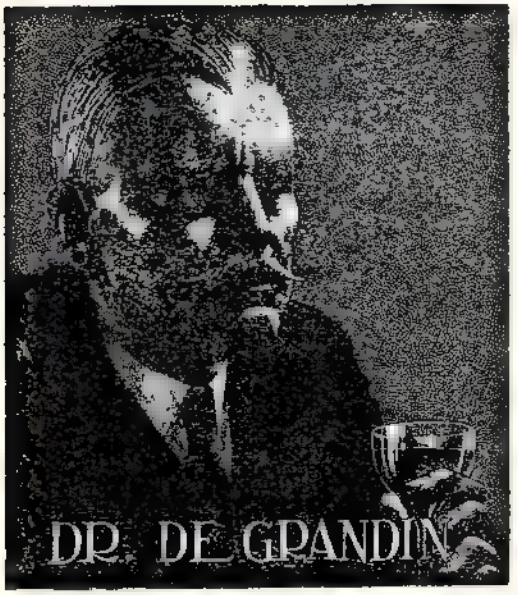
This time de Grandin was not to be caught napping. "Translate, if you will be so kind, Friend Trowbridge," he begged. "Is it another of his idioms—is the mummy to which he refers a genuine *cadavre,* or perhaps a papa's wife, or a mother—"

"No!" Dr. Taylor held explosive laughter in by main force. "This is no idiom, Dr. de Grandin. I wish it were. The fact is that though I'm not superstitious I've had a bad case of the jitters since last week when they brought out a new mummy at the Museum. It had been greatly delayed in transit due to the war, and when it came it took us all by surprise. Several of our younger men have joined the services, so I took it in charge. I wish I hadn't now, for unless I'm much mistaken it's what's called 'unlucky,' and—well, as I've said, I'm not superstitious, but . . ."

"I should think that any mummy might be called unlucky," I put in rather fatuously. "To be jerked out of the quiet restfulness of your grave and shipped across four thousand miles of water, then exhibited for people whom you'd call barbarians to gawk at—"

MY FAINT attempt at humor was completely lost on Dr. Taylor. "When an Egyptologist refers to a mummy as unlucky

The ancient gods of Egypt have the power to punish those disturbing the tombs of mummies



he has reference to its effect on the living, not to its peculiar luck or lack of it," he cut in almost sharply. "Call it nonsense if you will—and probably you will—but the fact is there seems some substance to the belief that the ancient gods of Egypt have the power to punish those disturbing the mummies of people dying in apostacy. Such mummies are referred to in the trade as 'unlucky'—unlucky for the people who find them or have anything to do with them. Tutankhamen is the classic example of this. He was a noted heretic in his day, you know, and had given great offense to the 'Old Ones' or their priests, which in the long run amounted to the same thing. So when he died, although they gave him an elaborate funeral, they set no image of Amen-Ra at the prow of the boat that ferried him across the Lake of the Dead, and the plaques of Seb, Tem, Nepthys, Osiris and Isis were not prepared to go with him into the tomb. Notwithstanding his belated efforts to be reconciled with the priesthood, Tutankhamen was little better than an atheist according to contemporary Egyptian theology, and the wrath of the gods followed him beyond the grave. It was not their wish that his name be preserved to posterity or that any of his relics be brought to light.

"Now, just consider contemporary happenings: In 1922 Lord Carnavon located the tomb. He had four associates. Carnavon and three of these associates died within a year or so of the opening of the tomb. Colonel Herbert and Dr. Evelyn-White were among the first to enter the tomb. Both died within twelve months. Sir Archibald Douglass was engaged to make X-rays of the mummy. He died almost before the plates could be developed. Six of the seven French journalists who went into the tomb shortly after it was opened died in less than a year, and almost every workman engaged in the excavations died before he had a chance to spend his pay. Some of these people died one way, some another. The fact is: *they all died.*

"Not only that: Even minor articles taken from Tut's tomb seem to exercise malign influence. There is proof absolute that attendants at the Cairo Museum whose duties keep them in or even near the room where Tutankhamen's relics are displayed sicken or die for no apparent reason. D'ye wonder that they call him an 'unlucky' mummy?"

"Bien, Monsieur. Et puis?" de Grandin prompted as our host lapsed into moody silence.

"Just this," responded Dr. Taylor. "This mummy I've had wished on me is dam' peculiar. It's Eighteenth Dynasty work, that much is plain, but unlike anything I ever saw before. There is no face mask nor funerary statue, either on the mummy or in the coffin, and the case itself is bare of writing. The old Egyptians always wrote the titles and biographies of the dead upon their coffins, you know, but this case is just bare, virgin wood; a beautiful shell of thin hard cedar to which not even varnish has been applied. Most mummy case lids are held in place by four little flanges, two to a side, which sink into mortises cut in the lower section and are held in place by hardwood dowels. This case has eight, three to each side and one at each end. They must have wanted to make sure that whoever was fastened in that coffin wouldn't break out. Furthermore—and this is more than merely unusual, it's absolutely unique—the bottom of the coffin is strewn four inches deep with spices."

"Spices?" echoed Jules de Grandin.

"Spices. Yes. We haven't analyzed 'em all yet, but so far we've identified clove, spikenard, cinnamon, aloes, thyme and gin-

ger, mustard, capsicum and common sodium chloride."

De Grandin pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. "This are unusual, *vraiment,*" he conceded. "And have you unwrapped him or perhaps X-rayed her?"

"Well, yes and no."

"Comment? *Oui et non?* Is this perhaps some of the famous double talk of which one hears so much?"

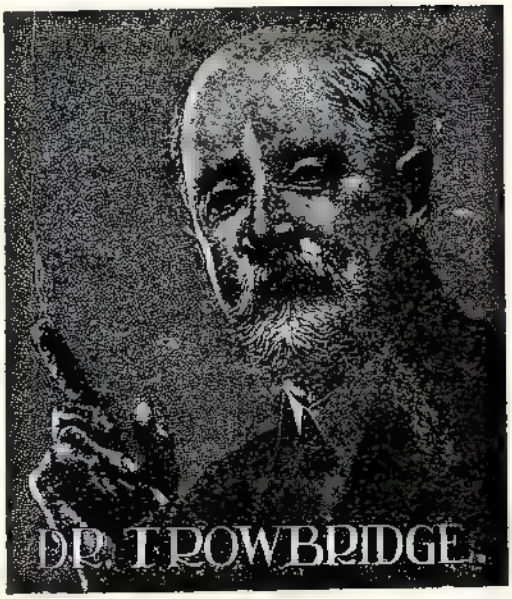
"Not exactly," our host grinned. "I meant to say that I've unwrapped the first layer of bandages, the crust or shell that's plastered with bitumen, you know, and subjected the mummy wrapped in its inner bandages, to the fluoroscope—"

"Yes? And then, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin prompted as Dr. Taylor paused so long it seemed he had no more to say.

"That's just it, Dr. de Grandin. It isn't well at all. What I've found confirms my first suspicions that I've an 'unlucky' mummy on my hands.

"Woeltjin, Dr. Oris Woeltjin, found this mummy in a cleverly hidden tomb between Nagada and Dêr El-Bahri, on the very eastern border of the Lybian Desert, territory given up as thoroughly worked over years ago. While they were excavating two of his *fallaheen* were bitten by tomb spiders and died in terrible convulsions. That in itself was unusual, for while the Egyptian tomb spider's an ugly-looking brute, he's not particularly venomous; I've been bitten by 'em half a dozen times and not suffered half as much as when stung by a scorpion. This must have impressed the rest of his workmen, too, for they deserted in a body, but Woeltjin stuck it out, and with the help of such neighborhood men as he could hire for double wages he finally reached the funerary chamber.

"That was only the beginning. He had the devil's own time getting down the Nile with it. Half the crew of his *dehabeeyah* came down with some sort of mysterious fever, several of 'em died and all the rest went overside, so it was almost two weeks before he'd finished a trip which in ordinary circumstances would have taken five days at most. The Egyptian government doesn't let you take a mummy out these days, but Woeltjin was an old hand at the game. He wheedled where he could and bribed where



he had to, and finally smuggled the thing out disguised as a crate of Smyrna sponges; got it as far as Liverpool, and died.

"The mummy knocked around the wharves and warehouses at Liverpool for almost two years, the war kept it there still longer, but finally it arrived, and—believe it or not!—our shipping department actually took it for a lot of sponges and let it lie around our storeroom almost two more years. The curator discovered it purely by accident last week. Well, with that background, what I found yesterday just about confirmed my suspicions that the thing's unlucky."

JULES DE GRANDIN leaned forward in his chair. "*Non d'un million moustiques pestifères, Monsieur,* what was it you discovered?" he demanded. "Me, I am consumed with curiosity."

Taylor smiled a trifle grimly. "The fluoroscope revealed the bony structure of the chest had been broken. Either she had died from an injury in what corresponded to the modern traffic accident, or"—he paused and took a sip of brandy—"she suffered death by a ritual roughly corresponding to the *peine forte et dure* of the medieval English criminal courts—crushed to death beneath a great pile of rocks, you know."

"But it might have been an accident," I objected. "Those two-wheeled chariots of

ancient days weren't very stable vehicles, and it would have been quite possible—"

"Possible, but not probable, in view of what the papyrus says," Dr. Taylor cut in. "I found the sheet of writing tucked between two layers of bandages—surreptitiously, I'd say—just after I'd completed my fluoroscopic inspection."

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his small wheat-blond mustache. *"Tiens, Monsieur,* why do you torment us thus, making a long story still longer? What did it say, this twenty-times-accursed papyrus of yours?"

"Plenty," Dr. Taylor answered. "I haven't finished translating it, but even its beginning has an air of eerie mystery. She describes herself as Nefra-Kemmah, servant of the Most High Mother, the Horned One, the Lady of the Moon—in fine, a priestess of the Goddess Isis. You get the implication?"

I shook my head; de Grandin leveled one of his unwinking cat-stares at our host, but made no answer.

"The priestess of Isis, unlike the servants of all other Mother-Goddesses of ancient days—Aphrodite and Tanith, for instance—were vowed to chastity and were as completely celebate as Vestal Virgins or Christian nuns. If one of them forgot her sacred obligations even to the small extent of looking at or speaking to a man outside the priesthood the consequences were decidedly unpleasant. If she, as the saying goes, 'loved not wisely but too well,' death by torture was the penalty. This might take several forms. Burial alive, wrapped and bandaged like a mummy, but with the face exposed to permit breathing, was one form of inflicting the punishment. Another was to crush her erring heart to pulp beneath a great pile of stones. . . ."

"Parbleu," de Grandin murmured. "This poor one, then, was one of those unfortunates—"

"All signs point to it. She was a priestess, vowed to chastity on pain of death; her ribs have been crushed in; her coffin bears no inscription, not even so much as a brush mark. It seems not only death, but oblivion had been her potion. Now, perhaps, you understand why I'm inclined to be jumpy. It's all right to say 'stuff and nonsense' when you hear unlucky mummies talked of, but any Egyptologist can cite instance after instance of 'accidents' occurring to those who come in contact with the mummies of those who died under interdict."

"What else did the papyrus say—or have you gotten any farther?" I asked.

"Humph. The farther I get into it the more I'm puzzled. You know something of Egyptian medical ideas?"

"A little," Jules de Grandin admitted, "but I would not presume to discuss them with you, *Monsieur.*"

TAYLOR smiled appreciation of the compliment.

"They had some odd notions. They thought, for instance, that the arteries contained air, that the seat of the emotions was the heart, and that anger generated in the spleen."

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded.

"But they were far in advance of their contemporaries, and even of the Greeks and Romans, for they had partly grasped the truth that reason resided in the brain. Remember that, for what comes next ties in with it.

"The Egyptians were probably the first great people of antiquity to formulate a definite idea of immortality. That was their reason for mummification of their dead. They believed that when three thousand years had passed the soul returned to claim its body, and without a fleshy tenement to welcome it, it would have to wander bodiless and homeless in Amenti, the realm of the damned. As the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah lived during the XVIIIth Dynasty—roughly somewhere between 1575 and 1359 B.C., she should now be about ready—"

"Ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin. *"Ah-ha?* You think—"

"I don't think anything. I'm only puzzled. Instead of praying to the gods to guide her wandering *ka* or vital principle back to her waiting body, Nefra-Kemmah asserts—states positively—she will rise again with the help of one who lives, and by the power of the brain. That is absolutely unique. Never before, to my knowledge, has such a thing been heard of. Even those who died apostate sought the pity of the gods and begged forgiveness for their sin of unbelief,

beseeching divine assistance in attaining resurrection. This little priestess declares categorically she will rise again with the help of a living human being and by the power of the brain." He drew an envelope from his pocket and scribbled a notation on it.

"Repeatedly I found these idiographs," he told us as he held the paper out for our inspection.

"The first one signifies *'arise,'* or, by extension, *'I shall arise,'* and the second means almost, though not quite, the same thing. *'Awake,'* or *'I shall awake to life.'* And always, she repeats that she will do it by the power of the brain, which complicates the message still farther."

"How's that?" I asked.

"WHY, if she's a mummy she can have no brain. One of the first steps of Egyptian embalming was to withdraw the brain by means of a metallic hook inserted through the nose."

"She surely must have known that," I began, but before our host could answer we heard laughter on the porch, a key clicked in the front door, and Vella Taylor swept into the drawing room with an unusually good-looking young soldier in her wake. "Hullo, Daddy-Man," she greeted as she planted a quick kiss on Taylor's bald spot. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge—Dr. de Grandin. This is Harrock Hall, my most 'special-particular boy friend. Sorry, I couldn't be here for dinner tonight, but Harrock's ordered away to camp early tomorrow, so I ran around to his house. It wouldn't have seemed fair to have taken him from his mother and father on his last night home, and I knew I wanted to be with him just as much as possible, so—what're you folks drinking? Cognac?" She made a face suggestive of vinegar mixed with castor oil. "Vile stuff! Come on, treasure," she linked her hand in the young soldier's. "Let's us see if we can promote some Benedictine and Spanish brandy. That's got a scratch and tastes good, too."

"You will inform us of developments?" de Grandin asked as we prepared to go. "This so remarkable young lady who had courage to defy the priests who had condemned her and declared that in spite of their sentence to oblivion she would rise again, she interests me."

IT MUST have been toward three o'clock when the persistent ringing of the telephone awakened me. The voice that came across the wire was agonized, almost hysterical, but doctors get used to that. "This is Granville Taylor, Trowbridge. Can you come right over? It's Vella—she's had some sort of seizure. . . ."

"What sort?" I interupted. "Does she complain of pain?"

"I don't know if she's in pain or not. She's unconscious—perfectly rigid, and—"

"I'll be there just as fast as gasoline can bring me," I assured him as I hung up and fished for the clothes which years of practice had taught me to keep folded on a bedside chair.

"What makes, *mon vieux?*" de Grandin asked as he heard me stirring. "Is it that Monsieur Taylor has met with the accident he feared—"

"No, it's his daughter. She's had some sort of seizure, he says—she's rigid and unconscious."

"Pardieu, that pretty, happy creature? Let me go with you, my friend, if you please. Perhaps I can be of assistance."

Her father had not overstated her condition when he said that Vella was rigid. From head to foot she was as stiff as something frozen; taut, hard as a hypnotist's assistant in a trance. We could not chafe her hands for they were set so stiffly that the flesh was absolutely unyielding. It might have been a lovely waxen tailor's dummy over which we bent rather than the happy, vibrant, vital girl to whom we'd said good-night a few hours before. Treatment was futile. She lay as hard and rigid as if petrified. As if she had been dead, her temperature was exactly that of the surrounding atmosphere, the uncanny hardness of the flesh persisted, and she was unresponsive to all stimuli, save that the pupils of her set and

staring eyes showed slight contraction when we flashed a light in them. There was practically no pulse perceptible, and when we drove a hypodermic needle in her arm to administer a dose of strychnine, there was no reflex flinching of the skin, and the impression we had was more like thrusting a needle through some tough waxy substance than into living flesh. As far as we could see vital functions were suspended. Yet she was not paralyzed in the ordinary sense of the term. Of that much we were certain.

"Is—is it epilepsy?" Dr. Taylor asked fearfully. "Her mother had a brother who—"

"*Non,* calm yourself, my friend," soothed de Grandin. "It is not the epilepsy, of that I can assure you." To me he added in a whisper: "But what it is *le bon Dieu* only knows!"

The dawn was brightening in the east when she began to show signs of recovery. The dreadful stiffness, so like rigor-mortis, gave way gradually, and the set and horrified expression of her eyes was replaced by a look of recognition. The rigid, hard lines faded from her cheeks and jaw, and her slender bosom fluttered with a gasp of respiration as a little sigh escaped her. The words she spoke I could not understand, for they were uttered in a mumbling undertone, strung together closely, like an invocation hurriedly pronounced, but it seemed to me they had a harsh and guttural sound, as though containing many consonants, utterly unlike any lanuguage I had ever heard before.

Now the whisper gave way to a chant, sung softly in an eerie rising cadence with a sharply accented note at the end of every measure. Over and over, the same meaningless jargon, a weird and wavering tune vaguely like a Gregorian chant. One single word I recognized, or thought I did, though whether it really were a word or whether my mind broke its syllables apart and fitted them to the sound of a more or less familiar name I could not be sure; but it seemed to me that constantly recurring in the rapid flow of mumbled invocation was a sibilant disyllable, much like the letter *s* said twice in quick succession.

"Is she trying to say 'Isis'?" I asked, raising my eyes from her fluttering lips.

De Grandin was regarding her intently with that fixed, unwinking stare which I had seen him hold for minutes when we were in the amphitheatre of a hospital and a piece of unique surgery was in progress. He waved an irritated hand at me, but neither spoke nor shifted the intentness of his gaze.

The flow of senseless words grew slower, thinner, as though the force behind the twitching red lips were lessening, but the weird soft chant continued its four soft minor notes slurred endlessly. Now her enunciation seemed more perfect, and almost without effort we could recognize a phrase that kept recurring: *O Nefra-Kemmah nehes—Nehes, O Nefra-Kemmah!"*

"Good God!" exclaimed Dr. Taylor. "D'ye get it, gentlemen? She's chanting, *'Nefra-Kemmah, awake—Arise, O Nefra-Kemmah!'* Nefra-Kemmah was the name of that priestess of Isis I told you of last night, remember? In her delirium she's identifying herself with the mummy!"

"She probably heard you talking of it—"

"I'm hanged if she did. You were the only two to whom I've mentioned it outside the Museum. I knew de Grandin has a taste for the occult, and you were to be relied on, Trowbridge, but as for mentioning that mummy to anybody else—no! D'ye think I'd want my daughter to think me a superstitious old fool, or would I court the pitying smiles of other outsiders? I tell you she never heard that cursed mummy's name, yet—"

"*S-h-sh,* she awakes," de Grandin warned.

Vela Taylor looked from Jules de Grandin to me, then past us to her father. "Daddy!" she exclaimed. "O, Daddy, dear, I've been so frightened!"

"Frightened, dear? Of what?" Taylor dropped to his knees beside the bed and took her hands in his. "Who's been trying to scare my little girl?"

SHE smiled a little ruefully. "I—I don't quite know," she confessed, "but whoever set out to do it surely got away with it. "I think it must have been those horrible old men."

"Old men, *Mademoiselle?"* de Grandin echoed. "Who and where were they, one asks to know? Tell me and I shall have

great pleasure in kicking their false teeth out—"

"Oh, they weren't really men at all, just dream-images, I suppose. But they seemed terribly real, and oh, how dreadfully afraid of them I was!"

"Tell us of it, if you please, *ma belle.* You have suffered a severe shock. Perhaps it was the result of nightmare, perhaps not; at any rate, if you can bring yourself to discuss the painful subject—"

"Of course, sir. Talking of it may help sweep my memory clear. Harrock left a little after you did, for he had to catch an early train this morning, and I came right upstairs and cried myself to sleep. Sometime this morning—I don't quite know when, but it must have been a little before three, for the moon had risen late and it was very bright when I awakened—I woke up with a dreadful sense of thirst. It must have been that crying made me feel so, I can't account for it otherwise; at any rate I was utterly dehydrated, and went to get a glass of water from the bathroom tap. When I came back to my room the first thing that I noticed was that a single shaft of moonlight was slanting through the window and striking full upon the mirror," she gestured toward the full-length glass that stood against the farther wall. "Something, I don't know what, seemed urging me to go and look into the glass. When I stopped before it, it seemed the moonlight had robbed it of its power of reflection. I couldn't see myself in it at all."

"Ah?" de Grandin nodded. "You cast no shadow?"

"None at all, sir. Instead, the mirror seemed to be glossed over with a layer of opaque silver—not quite opaque, either, but rather irridescent. I could see small points of light reflected in it, and somehow they seemed moving, whirling round and round each other like a swarm of luminous midges, and burning with an intense blue, cold flame. Gradually the glowing pinpoints of light changed from their spinning to a slow, weaving pattern. The luminous sheet they spread across the mirror seemed breaking up, forming a definite design of highlights and shadows. It was as if the mirror were a window and through it I looked out upon another world.

"The place I looked into was bright with moonlight, almost as bright as day. It was a long, wide, lofty collonaded building. I thought at first from what I'd heard Daddy say that it must be a temple of some sort, and in a moment I was sure of it, for I could hear the tinkling of sistra shaken in unison, and the low, sweet chanting of the priestesses. They knelt in a long double row, those sweet, slim girls, all gowned in robes of white linen, with bands of silver set with lapis lazuli bound about their brows. Their heads were bowed and their hands raised and held at stiff right angles to their wrists as they sang softly. Presently a young man came into the temple and walked slowly toward the altar-place. Despite the fact his head was shaven smooth, I thought him utterly beautiful, with full red lips, a firm, strong chin and great, soft, thoughtful eyes. He kept his gaze fixed on the tiles as he walked toward the altar, but just before he put aside the silver veil that hung before the face of Isis he glanced back and his eyes fell with a sort of sad reproachfulness upon the kneeling girl nearest him. I saw a flush mount up her throat and cheeks and brow, and she bent her head still lower as she sang, but somehow, though she gave no sign, I knew a thought-message had passed between them. Then slowly he passed beyond the veil and was gone.

"Suddenly to the chanting of the priestesses was joined the heavier chant of men singing in a sort of harsh harmony. Instinctively I knew what was transpiring. The young man I had seen had gone into the sanctuary of Great Isis to become one of her priests. He was being initiated into her mysteries. She would flood him with her spirit, and he would be hers for eternity. He would put away the love of woman and the hope of children, and devote himself wholeheartedly to the service of the Great All-Mother. The priestess I had seen blush knew it, too, for I could see the tears fall from beneath her lowered lids, and her slender body shook with sobs which she could not control.

"Then slowly, as if steam were forming on the mirror, everything became cloudy, and in a moment the scene in the temple was completely hidden, but gradually the vapor cleared away and I was looking out into bright daylight. The sun shone almost dazzlingly on a temple's painted pylon. In the

forecourt the sacred birds were feeding, and jets of water glinted jewel-bright from a fountain. A woman walked across the courtyard toward the splashing fountain, the priestess I had seen before. She was robed in a white linen shift that left her bosom and her ankles bare. Sandals of papyrus shod her slender henna-reddened feet, and jewels were on her arms. A band of silver set with lapis lazuli crowned the hair which she wore cut in a shoulder-length bob. In one hand she held a lotus bud and with the other she balanced a painted water pot on her bare shoulder.

"SUDDENLY, from the deep shadow cast by the high temple gate, an old man tottered. He was very feeble, but his rage and hatred seemed to impart power to his limbs as wires moved a marionette. By his red robe and blue turban and his flowing milk-white beard, no less than by his features, I knew him to be a Hebrew. He planted himself in the girl's path and let forth a perfect spate of invective. Of their actual words I could hear nothing, but subjectively I seemed to know what passed between them. He was reviling her for proselyting his son from the worship of the Lord Jehovah, for the Jewish youth, it seemed, had seen her and gone mad with love of her, because her vows made it impossible for them to wed, he had abjured his race and kin and God to take the vows of Isis, so that he might be near her in the temple and commune with her in common worship of the goddess.

"The little priestess heard the old man through, then turned away contemptuously with a curt, 'Jewish dog, thou snarlest fiercely, but wherewith hast thou teeth to bite?' and the old man raised his hands to heaven and called a curse on her, declaring she should find no peace in life or death until atonement had been made; until she turned against the heathen gods she worshipped and bore testimony to their downfall through another's lips.

" 'How sayest thou, old dotard?' asked the girl. 'Our gods are powerful and everlasting. We rule the world by their favor. Is it likely that I should turn from them? And if I did, how could it be that I should speak through the lips of another? Shall I become as one of those magicians the Greeks call polyphonists, who make a stick or stone of brute beast seem to talk because they have the power of voice-throwing?'

"Once more the scene shifted, and I looked out upon a moonlit night. The stars seemed almost within reach overhead, and there blew such a soft perfume on the moon-drenched air that you could almost see it take shape like dancing butterflies. In the deep blue shadow of the temple pylon crouched the priest and priestess, clinging to each other with the desperation of denied love. I saw her rest her curling shoulder-length-cut hair upon his shoulder, saw her turn her face up to his with eyes closed and lips a little parted, saw him kiss her brow, her closed eyes, her yearning, eager mouth, her pulsing throat, the gentle swell of her bare bosom . . . then like a pack of hounds that rush in for the kill, I saw the Hebrews pounce upon him. Knives flashed in the moonlight, curses hard and sharp as knife-blades spewed from their lips. 'Apostate swine, turncoat, backslider, renegade!' they called him, and with every bitter curse there was another biting stab. He fell and lay upon the sands, his life-blood spurting from a dozen mortal wounds, and as his murderers turned away I seemed to hear the patter of bare feet upon the tiles, and half a dozen shaven-headed priests of Isis came running. 'What passes here?' there leader, an old man, panted angrily. 'Thou Jewish dogs, if thou hast—'

"The leader of the assassins interrupted with a scornful laugh: 'Naught passes here, old bare-poll, all is passed. We took one of your priests and priestesses red-handed in infidelity. The man we dealt with, for aforetime he had been one of us; the woman we leave to thy vengeance, 'tis said thou hast a way of treating such.'

"I saw the priests seize the poor, stricken, trembling girl and lead her unresistingly away.

"Then once again the mirror clouded, and when it cleared I was looking full into the little priestess' face. She seemed to stand directly behind the glass, as close as my own reflection should have been, and she held out her hands beseechingly to me, begging me to help her. But my power of understanding was gone. Though I saw her lips

move in appeal I could make nothing of the words she strove so desperately to pronounce, although she seemed repeating something with a deadly, terrible insistence.

"Then suddenly I felt a dreadful cold come in the air, not the chill of the wind from the opened window, but one of those subjective chills we sometimes have that make us say, 'Someone is walking over my grave.' Instinctively I felt the presence of another person in my bedroom. Someone—no, some*thing* had come in while I watched the changing pictures in the mirror.

"I turned to look across my shoulder—and there they were. I think that there were five of them, though possibly there were seven—old men in long white robes with dreadful masks upon their faces. One wore a bull's head, another a mask like a jackal, another had a falseface like a giant hawk's head, and still another wore a headdress like a lion's face—"

"If they were masked how did you know they were old men?" I asked.

"I *knew* it. Their eyes were bright with a fierce, supernatural light, the kind of gleam that only those who are both old and wicked have in their eyes, and the flesh of their forearms had shrunk away from the muscles, leaving them to stand out like thick cords. Their hands and feet were knotty and misshapen with the ugliness of age, and the bones and tendons showed like painted lines against the skin.

"They grouped behind me in a semicircle, staring at me menacingly, and though they made no sound I knew that they were threatening me with something dreadful if I acceded to the little priestess' entreaty.

" 'Vella Taylor, you are dreaming,' I told myself, and closed my eyes and shook my head. When I opened them again the horrible old masked men still stood there, but it seemed to me they had come a step nearer.

"The priestess in the mirror seemed to see them, too, for suddenly she threw her hands up as if to ward off a blow, made a frenzied gesture to me as if to warn me to escape, and turned away. Then she disappeared in vapor, and I was left alone with those terrific, silent shapes.

" 'I won't be bluffed by anything so utterly absurd,' I declared, and started toward the door. The masked men drew together, barring my way. I turned toward the bed and they shrank back toward the corners of the room. Then I lay down and closed my eyes. 'I'll count up to a thousand,' I said. 'When I'm done counting I'll open my eyes, and they'll be gone.'

"But they weren't. In every corner of the room they hunched and crouched and panted, waiting the moment to pounce.

"I felt stark panic hammering at me; terror yammered at my will, abysmal fear ripped at my nerves, and when I tried to call to Daddy I could make no sound. A dreadful weight seemed pressing on me, so heavy I could not endure it; I felt it crushing out my breath, cracking my ribs, breaking every bone in my body. My eyes seemed starting from my face, I could feel my tongue protruding from my mouth, and..."

"Yes, *Mademoiselle,* and then?" de Grandin prompted as she ceased talking with a shudder.

"Then I saw you and Dr. Trowbridge and my own dear Daddy standing by me, and the terrible old men had gone away. You won't let them come back, will you?"

"Be assured, *Mademoiselle,* if they come back while I am here they shall indubitably wish they had not. Now it is time for you to get some rest and gather back your strength.

"Will you prepare the hypo, good Friend Trowbridge?" he asked me.

"D'YE realize what Vella saw was the Infernal Assizes of Old Egypt?" Dr. Taylor whispered as we tiptoed from the bed chamber.

"The Infernal Assizes?" I repeated.

"Precisely. When a man died the Egyptians believed his soul was led by Thoth and Anubis to Amenti, where it stood trial before the Judges of the Dead. These included hawk-headed Kebhsnauf, ape-headed Taumatet, dog-visaged Hapi, cat-headed Bes, and, of course, ox-headed Osiris. Similarly, when a living person was accused of heresey, a court of priests made up to represent the infernal deities tried him or her. The Priestess Nefra-Kemmah must have stood trial before just such a tribunal."

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured. "Ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?"

"What is it?"

"I am persuaded, Friend Taylor, that

what your daughter saw was more than 'such stuff as dreams are made on'—or, to be more explicit, just such stuff as that of which a dream is compounded, namely, thought-force. Just what it is I do not know, but somewhere there is an influence running from the mummy of the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah to *Mademoiselle* your daughter. The poor, misfortunate priestess seeks her aid, the ghostly old ones would prevent it. The daylight quickens in the east, my friend. Soon it will be full day. We shall arrange to have a nurse attend Mademoiselle Vella, and if you will be so kind we shall repair to the Museum and inspect this precious mummy of yours."

"H'm, that's a bit irregular," Taylor demurred.

"Irregular, *ha?* And by damn-it, was it not irregular for *Mademoiselle* your daughter to be vouchsafed a glimpse of the old times, to watch the unfolding of the romance of those so sadly unfortunate lovers, and to see the olden ones from the parapets of hell come trooping into her bed chamber? *Parbleu,* I damn think yes!"

WITH a precision rivaling that of a jeweler, Dr. Taylor cut away the criss-crossed bandages of yellowed linen that swathed the mummy of the Priestess Nefra-Kemmah. Yard after endless yard he reeled off, finally coming to a strong, seamless shroud drawn sackwise over the body and tied at the foot with a stout cord. The cloth of which the bag was made seemed stouter and heavier than the bandages, and was heavily coated with beeswax or some ceraceous substance, the whole being, apparently, both air- and water-tight.

"Why, bless my soul, I never saw a thing like this before!" exclaimed Dr. Taylor.

"*Monsieur,* unless I am more greatly mistaken than I have any right to suppose, I make no doubt there are at least a dozen things in this case which will be novelties to you," de Grandin answered rather grimly. "Come, cut away that seventeen-times-damned sack. I would see what lies within it.

"*Ah-ha?*" he exclaimed as with a gentle twitching motion Dr. Taylor worked the waxed bag upward from the mummy's shoulders. "*Que diable?*"

The body that came gradually in view beneath the blue-white glare of the electric lights was not technically a mummy, though the aromatic spices in the coffin and the sterile, arid atmosphere of Egypt had combined to keep it in a state of almost perfect preservation. The feet, first parts to be exposed, were small and beautifully formed, with long straight toes and narrow heels and high-arched insteps, the digits as well as the whole plantar region stained brilliant red with henna. There was astonishingly little desiccation, and though the terminal tendons of the *brevis digitorum* showed prominently through the skin the effect was by no means revolting; I had seen equal prominence of felxor muscles in living feet where the patient had suffered considerable emaciation.

The ankles were sharp and shapely, the legs straight and well turned, with the leanness of youth rather than the wasted look of death; the hips were narrow, almost boyish, the waist slender, and the gently swelling bosom high and sharp.

"*Morbleu,* Friend Taylor, you had right when you said she had suffered grievous hurt before she died," de Grandin murmured as the waxed sack slid over the body's shoulders.

I looked across his shoulder and gulped back an exclamation of horrified amazement. The slimly tapering arms had been folded demurely on the breast in accordance with Egyptian custom, but the humerus of the left arm had been cruelly crushed, resulting in a compound comminutive fracture, so that an inch or more of splintered bone had thrust through the skin above the deltoid attachment. The same cruel blow that crushed the arm had smashed the bony structure of the chest, the third and fourth ribs had snapped in two, and through the smooth skin underneath the breast a prong of bone protruded. "*La pauvre!*" de Grandin murmured. "*Fi donc!* By damn-it, if I could but come to grips with those who did this thing I should—" He paused in mid-word, pursed his lips as if about to whistle, then whispered half-thoughtfully, half-gleefully, "*Nom d'un porc vert, c'est possible!*"

"What's possible?" I demanded, but his only answer was a shrug as he diverted his gaze to the face exposed as Dr. Taylor drew

the sack away. The features were those of a woman in her early youth. Semetic in their cast, they had a delicacy of line and contour which bespoke patrician breeding. The nose was small, high-bridged, a little aquiline, with slim, aristocratic nostrils. The lips were thin and sensitive, and where they had retracted in the process of partial desiccation showed small, sharp teeth of startling whiteness. The hair was black and lustrous, cut in a shoulder-length bob that seemed amazingly modern, and bound about the brows was a circlet of hammered silver set with small studs of lapis lazuli. For the rest, a triple-stranded necklace of gold and blue enamel, armlets of the same design, and a narrow golden girdle fashioned like a snake composed her costume. Originally a full, plaited skirt of sheer white linen had been appended to the girdle that circled her slim torso just beneath the bosom, but the fragile fabric had not been able to withstand the years of waiting in the tomb, and only one or two thin whisps remained.

"La pauvre belle créature!" de Grandin repeated. "If it were only possible—"

"I think we'd better wrap the body up again," Dr. Taylor broke in. "To tell the truth, I'm just a little nervous—"

"You fear," de Grandin did not ask a question, he made an assertion. "You fear the ancient gods of olden Egypt may take offense at our remaining here to speculate upon the manner of this poor one's death—or murder, one should say."

"Well, you must admit there've been some unexpected things happening in connection with this mummy—if you can call it that, for technically it's never been embalmed at all, just preserved by the aromatics sprinkled in the coffin, and—"

"One understands and agrees," de Grandin nodded. "There have been unexpected happenings, as you say, Friend Taylor, and unless I'm more mistaken than I think, there will be more before we finish. I should say —*gran Dieu des pommes de terre,* observe her, if you please!"

As Dr. Taylor had reminded us, the body had not been embalmed but merely preserved by the spices strewn around it and the almost hermetic sealing of the coffin and waxed shroud. It had been dehydrated in the years since burial so that blood, tissue and bones while retaining their contours had been reduced to something less stable than talcum powder. Now, beneath the impact of the fresh damp air and Dr. Taylor's gentle handling the triturated body-substance began crumbling. There was nothing horrifying in the process. Rather, it was as if we witnessed the slow disintegration of a lovely image moulded in sand or chalk-dust.

"Sic transit bellitas mundi," murmured Jules de Grandin as the shape before us lost its human semblance. "At least we've seen her in the flesh, which is a thing those wicked old ones never thought would happen, and you, *Monsieur* still have the coffin and her priceless ornaments for souvenirs. They are decidedly worthwhile, and—"

"Damn her coffin and her ornaments!" Dr. Taylor cut in sharply. "What frightens me is what this devilish business may do to my girl. She's already partially identified herself with Nefra-Kemmah and saw a vision of the priestly court that condemned her to be crushed to death beneath great stones. If that vision keeps recurring—isn't there some way we can break up this obsession—"

"By blue, there is, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin assured him. "Precisely as a phobia may be overcome by showing him who suffers from it that it has no basis, so we can clear the vision of those wicked old ones from your daughter's mind. Of that I am persuaded. But the treatment will not be orthodox—"

"I don't care what it is. D'ye realize her sanity may be at stake?"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur.* Have we your consent to proceed?"

"Of course—"

"Trés bon. Tonight, at your convenience, we shall call at your house, and unless I am far more mistaken than I think, we shall give battle to and wrest a victory from those shapes that haunt the darkness. Yes. Certainly. Of course."

ALL day he was as busy and as bustling as a bluebottle fly. Calling on the telephone repeatedly, swearing poisonously improbable French oaths when he found our Friend John Thunstone had been called away from New York on a case, rushing to the Library to consult some books the libra-

rian had never heard of, but managed to dig up from dust-hidden obscurity at his insistence; finally dashing to the wholesale poultry market to secure something which he brought home in a thermos bottle and placed with loving care in the sterilizing cabinet of the surgery. At dinner he was almost silent, absent-mindedly forgetting to request a third helping of the lobster cardinal, a dish of which he was inordinately fond, and almost failing to refill his glass with Poully-Fuisse a fourth time.

"You've figured everything out?" I asked as we began dessert.

"*Corbleu,* I only wish I had," he answered as he raised a forkful of apple tart to his lips. "I used brave words to *Monsieur* Taylor, Friend Trowbridge, but just between the two of us I do not know if I am right or wrong. I grope, I feel my way, I stumble in the dark like a blind man in an unfamiliar street. I have an hypothesis, but it cannot yet be called a theory, and there is not time to test it. I warn you, what we do tonight may be dangerous. You can ill be spared to suffering humanity, my friend. The sick and ailing need your help. If you prefer to stay at home while I give battle to these olden forces of evil I shall not feel offended. It is not only your privilege, it is almost your duty to remain away—"

"Have I ever let you down?" I broke in reproachfully. "Have I ever stayed behind because of danger—"

"*Non, par la barbe d'un bouc vert,* that you have not, *brave comrade,*" he denied. "You may not be a trained occultist, but what you lack in training you make up in courage and loyalty, dear friend. You are one in twenty million, and I love you, *vieux comrade,* may the devil serve me hot with *sauce bordelaise* for his dinner if I do not!"

SHORTLY after nine o'clock that evening we gathered in the recreation room of Dr. Taylor's house. Vella, looking little worse for her attack of the night before, was wearing a black velvet dinner dress, quiet and unadorned, save for a great intricate gold pin which emphasized by contrast the ivory of her complexion and the dark mistiness of her black hair.

De Grandin set his stage precisely. Dribbling red liquid from his thermos bottle, he traced a double interlaced triangle across the tiled floor and placed four chairs inside it. "Now, *Mademoiselle,* if you will be so kind," he invited with a bow to Vella.

She dropped into an armchair, hands folded demurely in her lap, head lolling back against the cushions.

The little Frenchman took his stand before her, drew out a small gold pencil and held it vertically in front of her face. "*Mademoiselle,*" he ordered, "you will please be kind enough to look at this—at its very tip, if you will. So. Good. Excellent. Observe him closely."

Deliberately, as one who beats time to a slow andante tune, he wove the little gleaming pencil back and forth, describing arabesques and intricate interlacing figures in the air. Vella watched him languidly from under long black lashes, but gradually her attention became fixed. We saw her eyes follow every motion of the pencil, finally converge toward each other until it seemed she made some sort of grotesque grimace; then the lids came down across her great dark eyes and her head moved slightly sidewise as her neck muscles relaxed. Her folded hands fell loosely open on her velvet clad knees, and she was, to all appearances, sleeping peacefully. Presently the regular, light heaving of her bosom and her softly sibulated, regular light breathing told us she had indeed fallen asleep.

De Grandin returned the pencil to his pocket, put his fists upon his hips and held his arms akimbo as he regarded her steadily. "You can hear me, cannot you, *Mademoiselle?*" he demanded.

"I can hear you," she repeated drowsily.

"*Bien.* You will rest a moment, then, as the inclination moves you, say whatever comes into your mind. You understand?"

"I understand."

For something like five breathless minutes we waited in silence. I could hear the great clock in the hall above: "*Tick*-tock—*tick*-tock!" and the soft hiss of a green log burning in the fireplace, then, gradualy, but certainly, for no reason I could think of, the room began to grow colder. A hard, dull bitterness of cold that seemed to affect the spirit as well as the body pervaded the atmosphere; a biting, searing cold suggestive

of the limitless freezing eternities of interstellar space.

"Ah-ha!" I heard de Grandin's small strong teeth click sharply, like a pair of castanets. *"Ah-ha-ha!* It seems you did not wait a second invitation, *Messieurs las Singeries."* How they came there I had no idea, but there they were—a semi-circle of old men in flowing robes of white linen, masked with headgear simulating hawks, jackals, lions, apes and oxen. They stood in a grim, silent crescent, looking at us with dull, lack-luster eyes, the very embodiment of inhibitory hatred.

"Mademoiselle," de Grandin whispered, "the time has come for you to speak, if you can find the words."

The sleeping girl moaned softly, tried to articulate, then seemed to choke upon a word.

The semi-circle of grim silent watchers moved a step nearer, and the cold that theretofore had been a mere discomfort became a positive torture. The nearest of the shadowy masked figures reached the point of one of the interlaced triangles, paused irresolutely a moment, then shrank back.

"Sa-ha, Monsieur Tête de Singe, you do not like him, *hein?"* de Grandin asked with a short spiteful laugh. "Have patience, *Monsieur* Monkey-Face; there is to come that which you will like still less." He glanced across his shoulder at the girl. "Speak, *Mademoiselle.* Speak up and fear no evil!"

"Lords of the Ghostland," came a voice from Vella Taylor's lips, but it was not her voice. There was an indefinable and eerie undercurrent to the tone that sent a shiver tingling up our spines. Her words were slurred and langorous, yet strangely mechanical, as though an unseen hand were playing a gramaphone:

"Revered and dreadful judges of the worlds of flesh and spirit, ye awful ones who sit upon the parapets of hell, I answer guilty to the charge ye bring against me. Aye, Nefra-Kemmah who stands now before ye on the brink of deathless death, whose body waits the crushing stones of doom, whose spirit, robbed forever of the hope of fleshly tenement, must wander till time blends into eternity, confesses that the fault was hers, and hers alone.

"Behold me, awesome judges of the living and the dead, am I not a woman, and a woman shaped for love? Are not my members beautiful to see, my lips like apricots and pomegranates, my eyes like milk and beryl, my breasts like ivory set with coral? Yes, mighty ones, I am a woman, and a woman formed for joy.

"Was it my fault or my volition that I was pledged to serve the Great All-Mother or ever I had looked upon the daylight? Did I abjure the blissful agony of love and seek a life of sterile chastity, or was the promise spoken for me by another's lips?

"I gave all that a woman has to give, and gave it gladly, knowing that the pains of death, and after death the torment of the gods awaited me, nor do I deem the price too high a one to pay.

"YE FROWN. Ye shake your dreadful heads upon which rest the crowns of Amun and of Kneph, of Seb and Tem, of Suti, and Osiris' mighty self. Ye whisper one to other that I speak sacrilege. Then hear me yet awhile: She who stands in chains before you, shorn of all reverence as a priestess, stripped of all honor as a woman, tells ye this to your teeth; knowing that ye cannot do her greater hurt than she stands prejudged to endure. Your reign and that of those ye serve draws to a close. A little while ye still may strut and preen yourselves and mouth the judgments of your gods, but in the days to come your very names shall be forgot save when some stranger from another time and place drags forth your withered mummies from the tomb and sets them up to make a show of. Aye, and the gods ye serve shall be forgotten. They shall be sunk so low that none shall be found in the world to do them reverence; none to call on their names, not even as a curse, and in their ruined temples there shall not be found a living thing except the fearful, whimpering jackal and the white-bellied lizard.

"And who shall do this thing to them and ye? An offspring of the Hebrews. Yea, from the race of him I loved and for whose sake I trod my vows of cold sterility into the desert sand, from that race that ye despise and hate shall come a child and unto Him shall be all glory. He shall put down your gods beneath His feet and spoil

them of all respect; they shall become but shadow-gods of a forgotten past.

"My name ye've stricken from the roll of priestesses of the All-Mother; no writing shall be graven on my tomb or coffin, and I shall be forgotten for all time by men and gods. So reads your dreadful judgment.

"Ye hoary-headed fools, I hurl the lie into your teeth! Upon a day in the far future men from a strange land shall delve into the tomb where ye have laid me and take forth my body from it, nor shall your spite and hatred stop them till they've looked upon my face and seen my broken bones and heard the story of my love for the Hebrew who for my sake abjured his God and became a shaven-headed servant of the great All-Mother. I swear that I shall tell the story of my love and death, and in another age and land strange men shall hear my name and weep for me—but *your names they shall never know.*

"Ye think to cast me to oblivion? I tell ye I shall triumph in the end, and it is ye who shall be utterly forgotten, nameless as the sands the wind pursues across the desert.

"Pile now your stones of doom upon my heart and still its fevered beating. To death I go, but not from out the memory of men as ye shall. I have spoken."

The girl's voice ended on a weary little sob, and de Grandin's shout of spiteful laughter slashed the silence as a sword might slash through flesh.

"And hast thou heard, thou animal-faced fools?" he asked. "Who prophesied the truth, and who was caught in the web of his own conceit, old monkey-faces? Take now your pale and breathless shades back to that shadow-land from whence they came. Ye tried your evil best to keep her from revealing her story, and ye have failed. Go—go quickly to oblivion. *In nomine Dei,* I bid ye begone now and henceforth!"

He took a step toward the half-circle of masked forms, and they gave ground before him. Another step, and they fell back another pace. They were wavering now, becoming less substantial, more shadowy; as he raised his hands and took a third step toward them they seemed merely nebulous gray vapor swirling and eddying in the light draft from the open fireplace where the logs blazed, and—suddenly they were gone.

"*Fini—triomphe—achevé—parfait!*" de Grandin drew a silk handkerchief from his cuff and wiped his brow. "Ye were strong and hateful, *Messieurs les Revenants,* but Jules de Grandin he is strong, too, and when it comes to hating—*morbleu,* who knows his power better than you?"

WHAT was that stuff you sprinkled on the floor of Taylor's recreation room before we began tonight, and why did it hold back those dreadful shadowy forms while Vella spoke?" I asked him as we drove homeward.

He broke off the tune he hummed with a laugh. "It was pigeons' blood, my friend. I got it from the *marchand de volaille* this afternoon. As to why it held them back, *morbleau,* I am as much at sea as you. It is one of those things we know without understanding.

"You know, by example, that in all ancient religions the priest was wont to purify the altars with the blood of the sacrifices —of the goats, lambs, doves or bullocks offered to the god?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"And for why? Not that the blood is cleansing. *Mais non.* Blood is simply liquid tissue, and very messy stuff indeed. Why, then? Because, my friend"—he tapped me solemnly upon the knee—"the blood contained some secret, potent power to *hold the god in check.* He could not pass beyond a circle traced in it. That kept him in his place and kept him in control as one might say. He could not swoop down on the congregation past that barrier of sacrificial blood, as long as that stood between him and them they were safe from his wrath or spite or his capricious wish to do them hurt and injury. Yes. Of course. Very good. The priests of Isis wet her altars with the blood of doves. I secured a similar substance and with it traced a pentacle about us; the votaries of Isis, like their mistress, could not pass by that barrier; within it we were safe. And then, *pardieu,* when Mademoiselle Vella had delivered Nefra-Kemmah's message to us—shown those olden ones their cruel and wicked judgment had

been set at naught—then, morbleu, they were completely undone. They had not strength nor spirit to oppose me when I ordered them to begone. *Parbleu,* I literally laughed them out of existence!" He drummed gloved fingers on the silver knob of his short military cane:

Sacré de nom,
Ron, ron, ron.
La vie est brêve,
La nuit est longue—"

he hummed. "Make haste, Friend Trowbridge."

"Why, what's the hurry?"

"It is dry work, this battling with those olden dusty ones, and just before we left for Monsieur Taylor's I saw a man put a bottle of champagne in the frigidaire."

"A man put champagne in our frigidaire?" I echoed. "Who—"

C'est moi—I am the man, my friend, and *mort d'un rat mort,* how I do thirst!"

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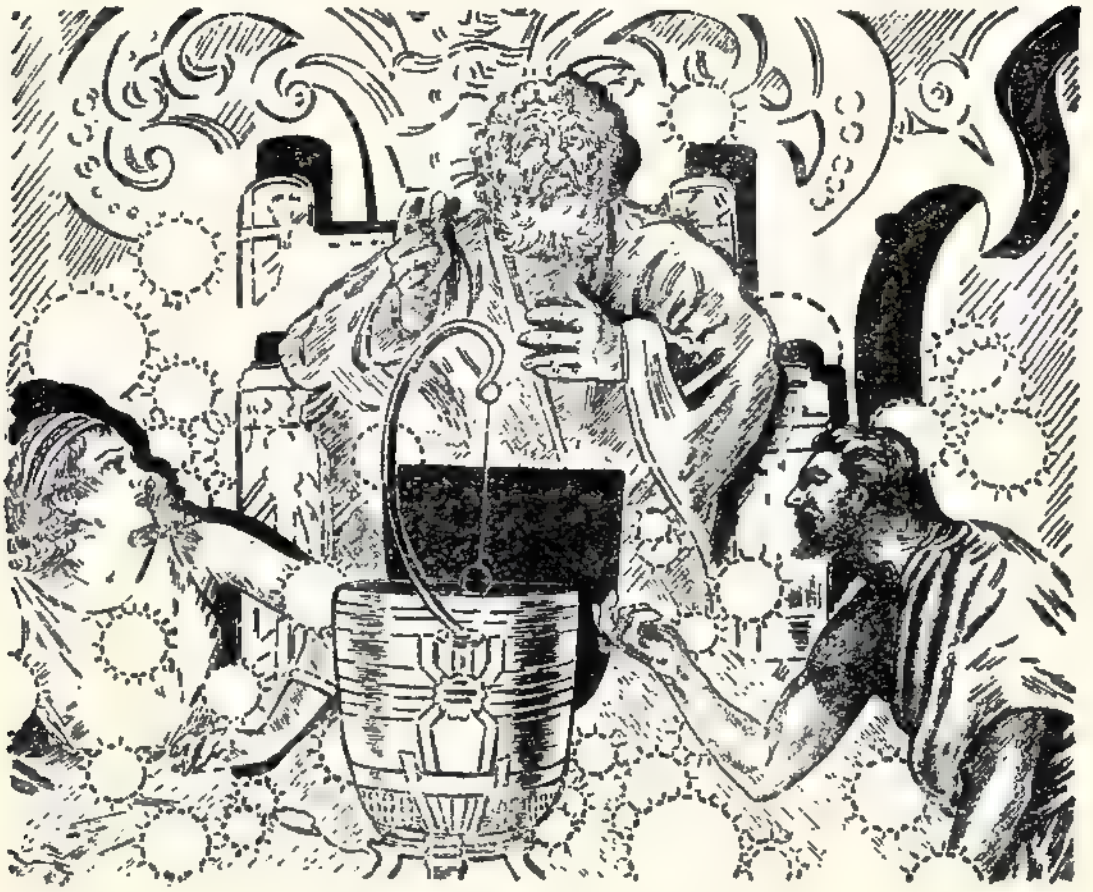
WEIRD TALES

FOR MAY

Out March First

In the Beginning



By H. BEDFORD-JONES

JASPER CONKLING is not a queer fellow at all. He is head of Conkling & Strauss, importers, a pretty keen business man, and like most men who have attained sixty or so, knows a good deal that he doesn't broadcast.

As his lawyer and fairly intimate friend, I was aware that he had a certain leaning toward the occult and that was all. Probably he took me for a hard-headed unbeliever.

He was right about that. I am.

When he broke this story to me, I thought at first he had gone off his nut.

"What would you say," he began, "if I told you that my office safe contained a link

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

Most men who have attained sixty or so know a good deal they don't broadcast—or can't . . .

with the philosophers, magicians and soothsayers of past ages?"

"It's entirely possible," I rejoined. He fingered his white goatee and mustache, smiled slightly, and his brilliant, piercing eyes twinkled at me.

"But if I went further and said that this link was articulate and could relate its history and experience in such a manner that these could be made into coherent stories?"

"I'd say your agile mind was slipping," I replied, "or else that some drugstore spook-chaser had you under his thumb, which amounts to the same thing."

He chuckled. "My boy, I'm going to surprise you. I'm telling you cold facts. Also, they will be supported, or at least credited, by the thousands of people who today are in more or less constant communication with the other world."

I relaxed. "Bosh! Jasper Conkling, have you become converted at your age to the inane mouthings and doubletalk of spirit mediums and street-corner charlatans?"

"You misapprehend," said he, with a quiet earnestness that was impressive. "I grant you that professional mediums, spiritists and so on are the bunk. I'll go farther and say that anyone, *anyone*, who exploits the occult for gain of any sort, is a rascal. If he had some occult power in the first place, as many have had, and used it to these ends, it was withdrawn from him. That is the first law of the supernatural."

"What the devil do you know about the supernaural?" I demanded. He chuckled. He chuckled again.

"More than you'd imagine. On the other hand, there are countless people today, and always have been, who do possess occult knowledge or powers, unsuspected by any around them. They keep their mouths shut, wisely, about it. They have no dealings with the false prophets who chase the dimes and dollars of the credulous."

"What do you mean? Can you rattle off some incantation and call up a ghost?"

"My boy, I'm speaking of plain, commonsense, practical things, like the brass cup now in my office safe. I can give you the notes of its memoirs, if I may so term them."

"A cup?" I echoed. "Did you say a cup?"

"I said a cup. A brass cup." His shrewd blue eyes were twinkling again. "Later, if you're interested. I can show you this object at work—though I cannot yet explain its workings. I hope to do so later. If you'd care to take the notes I have regarding its origin and expand them into suitable form, you may do so."

"Very well," I said, to humor him. As a client, his account was worth a large sum annually, and I was not fool enough to chuck it up.

"But mind you," he added gravely, "while perhaps these memoirs cannot be substantiated, the existence of this cup is a historical fact, as far back as the sixth century AD at the very least. Here are the notes; you weave them into a yarn as you like."

I took the bulky envelope of typed pages he thrust at me, and when I got home laid them aside and, for a few days, forgot them. Jasper Conkling's talk of plain, practical things rather tarnished the gloss of illusion; had he declared this to be arrant black magic, curiosity would have tempted me to jump into it.

But the moment came when I opened the envelope and delved into the typed pages, and from the very first sentence, the lure took hold of me. "It is gainful knowledge to make dead men speak the truth." Curious, almost sinister words!

IF THAT cup spoke the truth—and I say "spoke" advisedly—what a strange link it made with Greek and Roman fumblings at the occult, with Gothic and Saracen necromance, with wizardry of old France and Germany! The pages to hand dealt only with its origin. This was two thousand years ago, in the day when the sage Apollonius lived in Tyana and was world-famed as the master of all wisdom, and beneath the shady old fig-tree by the harbor mouth sat deep-eyed Cleon, architect of the new temple being built in honor of the earth-mother. A pleasant man, Cleon, an athlete until a falling block of marble crushed one foot in youth; now he limped, walking with a stick, and the Greeks who worshipped beauty turned their eyes from him, and the woman whom he loved was forced to see him no more. Helen was her name, and Agias her father was president of the city council and a merchant whose ships traded to lands afar.

If she could not see Cleon, at least she could and did go to Apollonius, the master of healing, who was called a wizard because

in his search for medicinal art, then thought to be magical, he had traveled over the known world and had pierced the secret mysteries of all people. He was the only Greek, other than Plato, to have passed the veil of Isis and gained the secrets of the Egyptian masters, and now he was an old, old man who healed without fee and loved all men, and was loved by them.

Helen came to him and clasped him about the knees, after the manner of a Greek suppliant, and broke into tears. She was a slim golden creature, too slim for beauty—the Greeks liked 'em plump—but she had a way with her. When they called her Helen, which meant "taker," they were right.

"Help him, Apollonius!" she begged. "Cleon is your friend; help him! They're plotting against him—my father, and that rascal Thyrax who hopes to marry me, and Captain Hiram, the Sidonian shipmaster who serves my father."

"What are they plotting?" demanded the sage, blinking at her.

"I don't know. I can't find out; but they mean to have his life. Thyrax hates him because I love him. My father hates him because he limps, and is not wealthy, and loves me. Captain Hiram is a hard, evil man who hates everything and everyone."

"Is that the master whose big galley is just back from Alexandria, and lies unloaded at your father's wharves?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, you must help Cleon! No one else can help him. You can do anything, and you are his friend."

"But I cannot heal his injured leg, child," said Apollonius sadly. "Many things I cannot do. Wisdom can help itself, but can rarely help others. Still, Cleon is a brave fellow and has a heart of gold, and is beloved by the gods. I'll see what I can do."

She rose, all tears and laughter, and flung her arms around him in joyous gratitude. Apollonius kissed her cheek, not without a sigh, and patted her shoulder.

"There was a time—" he said, and checked himself. "Why, child, these arms of yours are muscled like steel!" he exclaimed in surprise. "You make me afraid."

"Of what?" she asked, smiling.

"The future," he answered darkly. His wisdom had many secrets. Now he would say no more, but put her from him and bade her return home and trust to him.

But it was too late; the hour had already struck. Even while they talked here, the heavy-browed Agias and two other elders of the council had been visiting the temple construction.

Cleon received them hospitably, gave them seats in the shade of the wide fig-tree, and discussed his plans with them. He was surprised by the friendliness of Agias; instead of his usual hostility, the merchant showed confidence and warm approval of the work, complimenting him highly.

"I would like your opinion on something," Agias said to him. "One of my ships, as you know, has just arrived from Egypt—she's not yet unloaded. Well, Cap'n Hiram had a chance to pick up several pillars from the temple of Demeter at Tanis; that's the Greek colony near Alexandria, you know—a very ancient city."

"Oh!" exclaimed one of the councillors. "He brought them for our temple of Demeter here, did he?"

Agias laughed. "That was his idea; but can they be used?" He's due at my house now with his reports. Why not come along, everybody? And you, Cleon. I don't know whether you can use those pillars here; if you can, I'll contribute them gratis to the work. And, by the way, he brought some excellent wine of Cyprus. I'd like you to try it."

NO ONE had to be asked twice, and the party set off at once for the pleasant villa of Agias in the upper town. On the way, Thyrax met and joined them, so that they made a round half-dozen in all.

Cleon was a trifle suspicious of the merchant's sudden cordiality, and was well aware of the feelings of Thyrax—he reciprocated them fully, having no love for this coldly scheming man who aspired to Helen's love. Praise of his work had dulled the sharp edge of caution, however, and when Captain Hiram joined the party and spoke with admiration of his architectural skill, Cleon quite warmed to the dark Sidonian. Also, Agias brought out a precious silver goblet from Crete, and insisted on toasting the architect of the new temple, which was a pleasant honor.

That Cyprian wine was rich and heady, and the slaves kept the cups filled, and by the time they got around to discussing those

pillars, Cleon had put away more than he realized. Captain Hiram's warm praises were pleasant in his ears, too.

"There are four of the pillars," said the captain after another drink. "Not large, and instead of being plain they are exquisitely sculptured. They have neither capitals nor bases—just the marble pillars. They are said to have been brought from Greece long ago, and to have been carved by Pheidias himself."

"But they're Egyptian, all the same," spoke out Thyrax. The Sidonian assented.

"Yes, of course."

"And it's quite impossible to use Egyptian pillars in a Greek temple. It can't be done," asserted Thyrax positively. "The proportion and shape—"

"Why, that's nonsense," broke in Agias. "I never heard of such a thing! What do you say, Cleon? You're an architect."

It was too good a chance to set Thyrax back on his heels. Cleon jumped at it.

"How high are they?" he asked.

"About eighteen feet," Captain Hiram replied. "But damned heavy."

"You set 'em down at my temple construction, and I'll put 'em up in a week," he said confidently. "I have the exact place for them—to hold up the cornice on the east front. No other pillars there, so they won't have to match anything else—"

"You'll ruin the whole work!" exclaimed Thyrax vehemently. "You'll spoil the entire temple and make the city ridiculous! I tell you it can't be done!"

A violent argument burst forth, considerably heated by the Cyprian wine. The city councillors were in alarm lest the temple be ruined; Cleon was overjoyed to have Agias on his side against Thyrax, and stuck to his contention.

Captain Hiram could give no description of the columns, except that they were marvelously carved.

Cleon tried to keep his head, but came close to blows with Thyrax, who finally threw a heavy purse on the table.

"Five hundred pieces of gold says it can't be done—and the city council to be the judges!" said he furiously.

"That's a fortune," rejoined Cleon. "I've nothing to match it—"

"You have brains," Thyrax countered mockingly. "What! The famous architect can't support his own notions? You do well to be afraid, you rascally upstart!"

"That's the price of a first-class slave," said Captain Hiram, laughing. "Match it with yourself, Cleon! Wager your freedom against the purse!"

This, eventually, was just what Cleon did. Infuriated by Thyrax, his judgment ruined by the wine, he cast prudence to the winds. A scribe was called. The wager was duly written out and witnessed by all present. The columns were to be so placed as to be approved by the council and the citizens; failing which, Cleon was to be sold as a slave and the money handed over to Thyrax. Success meant that the purse of gold would go to him. The time element was extended to a month, however.

Captain Hiram promised to deliver the four columns on the morrow.

NEWS of the wager spread like wildfire. While the city was ruled by the council, every citizen had a voice, and civic pride ran high; council and citizens were to be the judges, and a good thing too. There would be no spoiling the looks of this temple to please an architect's whim. The average citizen was a pretty good judge of art, as well.

Yet the very thought of incorporating in this temple four pillars from the famous old city in the Nile delta, and said to have been carved by the hand of Pheidias himself, hundreds of years ago, was inspiring. Public sentiment was fairly balanced. No one cared a hang whether the wager were won or lost; all that mattered was the temple, but this mattered vitally, because heavy taxes had been levied to pay for it. The excitement began to rise daily.

Apollonius, who had been called over to Samos to help combat an outbreak of plague there, came back home to find a despairing note from Helen asking why he had not intervened. He read it, heard the news from his slaves, and shook his head. Donning a clean white chlamys with scarlet border—he was not above a trifle of vanity in his old age—he took staff in hand and stumped downtown, his white hairs and venerable beard blowing in the breeze.

As usual, quite a crowd tagged after him, for he was easily the most famous man in the city, and whenever he went abroad peo-

ple thronged around begging for charms or miraculous cures or bits of wisdom.

But today he sent them all packing, and made his way to the new temple, where Cleon's table was set beneath the shady fig-tree. The table was heaped with sketches and writing materials, and Cleon sat staring at nothing. He jumped up as the sage approached.

"Pardon, master—I did not see you coming. Here, take my stool."

"You look like a stricken man, my friend."

"So am I, by my own folly," said Cleon. "I'm a fool!"

"No; you walked into a trap," rejoined Apollonius. "I know about the wager; I tried to warn you, but it was too late. Tell me the rest."

Cleon walked over to one of the four columns, laid nearby and covered with canvas. He laid one of them bare. It was a beautiful shaft of marble, barely six inches thick at the bottom, rising and swelling until, halfway up, it became the figure of the goddess Demeter, whose uplifted arms were ready to support a cornice above.

"Look at it!" he said bitterly. "The others are similar—tiny shafts at the base, widening into full figures above."

"I see nothing wrong with it," said Apollonius. "Indeed, it seems exquisite. Of course, I am no architect. I can discourse of medicine, of healing herbs, or philosophy and the wisdom of the gods. I deal with the clouds, not with stones."

"I've been working over it for days, all in vain," said Cleon gloomily. "A pillar or column cannot rest upon so tiny a base—there must be a pedestal of some sort. It looks like a bottle upside down. Here, glance at these sketches—I've tried in every conceivable way to make the things look proper. It is impossible. No one knows how they were placed in that temple in Egypt. . . ."

He raked over his countless sketches, making the point clear. He had sketched bases of every imaginable kind for those four columns, and in every case they looked grotesque. Apollonius suggested inverting them; this was all very well, except that the figures would then be standing on their heads.

For an hour, the matter was argued on every side. Apollonius told of how Helen had begged his aid; but now, as he said frankly, he was powerless to give any. The ingenuity of the trap was deadly. There was no escape from it. No possible way appeared in which those pillars, with their spindly narrowing bases, could be placed.

"And yet," said Apollonius thoughtfully, "Pheidias placed them and made them, and he was the greatest sculptor and artist of the ages!"

"Then let him tell us how," said Cleon, with a despairing laugh. "I'm done. So far as I can see, the thing's impossible. I'll become a slave for life, and serves me right for being a fool."

The old man started slightly, at those words.

"My son, Pheidias might indeed tell us," he said gravely. "There is a way."

"I'm not jesting," snapped Cleon.

"Nor am I. I have never used this way, this means, to talk with the dead; yet it is gainful knowledge to make dead men speak the truth! I heard from the priests in Egypt of the method. If you like, we may try it. But first I must warn you."

Cleon, startled, regarded him with comprehension. "Do you speak of magic?"

"So it is called; whenever people do not understand a thing, they call it magic. Yet I must warn you," went on Apollonius earnestly. "A penalty is attached to the use of this method to serve personal ends, as in this case."

"Anything's better than slavery," said Cleon. "Even death. I'm not afraid of death; but I dread slavery."

"Death, to the uninformed, is always a heavy thing, but the wise man smiles at it," said the sage. "Have you any knowledge of graving in metals?"

"Every architect must have such knowledge," said Cleon.

"Very well. Search in the shops for a cup of brass, good solid brass. It must be a span across the top, and at least a span deep."

"Easily found," said Cleon promptly.

"Ah, but you must work upon it! Inside this cup, a third of the way down from the rim, you must engrave the letters of the alphabet, so that they run clear around the

cup. And to one outer edge of the rim, attach a small brass ring. That is all. Do this, bring it to my house tomorrow evening, and I shall furnish the rest."

"Master," said Cleon, wide-eyed, "surely you do not deal in sorcery?"

"You fool, haven't I more sense, at my age?" barked the philosopher. "I must see Agias now and arrange to have Helen come to my house also; she must take part in this work. Sorcery, magic, mumbo-jumbo, wizardry—call it what you like. You have an educated brain and should know better. I suppose you think I can mumble some incantation and pluck a demon out of the air! Well, perhaps I could. At least, it can be done. But how am I to explain natural laws to idiots? This is merely natural causation. . . .'

Snorting in his beard, he seized his staff and stumped away, still growling. Cleon stared after him, then broke into a laugh.

"Magic or not, what's the difference?" he said. "He's lending his help, which is the main thing. Talk with the dead, indeed! I'd talk with the gods themselves or the Lord of Hades if it would get me out of this trap!"

Just the same, it was a trifle startling to talk in that matter-of-fact way about speaking with the dead. What to Apollonious was pure matter-of-fact, to others was apt to be somewhat hair-raising.

Little Cleon cared; his faith in the sage was absolute. And the prospect of seeing Helen was heartening. He had not exchanged a word with her for weeks past, so strictly did Agias keep her guarded by slaves. So he went to work at his assigned task hopefully.

It was not difficult to obtain such a cup as was desired; he got a handsome, heavy cup that stood solidly on three feet, made fast the ring as ordered, and set to work on the alphabet. This required nicety of craftsmanship, and was not finished until sunset of the following day.

THE daylight died, the stars came forth. The cup wrapped and under his arm, Cleon made his way to the house of Apollonius, going to the rear entrance. A slave admitted him and led him to the private apartment of the sage, through rooms whose walls held cases of manuscripts. The house had been decorated by a Cretan artist, and everywhere were seen the strange painted sea-monsters such as ranged in the palace of King Minos at Crete.

In the inmost chamber, an austere room lighted by a tall bronze Etruscan lamp, was waiting Helen. She started up as Cleon entered; he set down the cup and folded her in his arms—a meeting of silent, tense emotion too deep for words.

"Where is Apollonius?" he asked at length.

"With my father—oh, yes, he insisted on coming. Apollonius will manage him. I'm supposed to be quite ill." She laughed a little and drew back. "Cleon! Is it all true, what Apollonius told me? Yes, of course it is—and yet, so strange, so incredible! But here he comes—I hear his staff—"

The sage himself strode into the room and greeted Cleon with a growl.

"Well! Agias is safe for the present. Let's see that cup." He unwrapped the brazen cup and inspected it. "Well enough. Sit down, you two, at the table under the lamp. Now don't pester me with questions. Obey me, and fear nothing."

The table-top was empty. A jar of water stood nearby, and taking it, Apollonius filled the cup partly full, until the water was nearly up to the graven letters. He set the cup carefully on the table, then produced a cord and a short rod of brass.

The base of this rod he fitted into the ring on the lip of the cup, which held the rod upright. The top was bent over in a curve and was fitted with a ring, through which he slipped one end of the cord. This was a heavy three-fold cord of silk. He drew it through to the end, which was fastened to a light brazen circlet or ring. Thus, the cord with its ring was suspended directly over the cup. He lowered the ring until it was inside the cup and almost touching the water, then seated himself.

"Now," he said, separating the loose ends of the cord into three parts, "each of you hold, with me, one of these strands. Cleon, have you writing materials?"

Cleon produced a wax tablet and stylus, and laid them ready.

"No talk," went on Apollonius gravely. "Fasten your eyes and thoughts on the ring

hanging inside the cup. I'll do any talking that's necessary."

To Cleon, the whole performance looked silly. He did not know what to expect; and assuredly there was no necromance at work. The light was bright; the gods were not invoked; there were no incantations or other indicia of wizardry. He was rather disappointed, and it was hard to fasten his mind upon that brass ring, with Helen so close. His foot found hers beneath the table, and her blue eyes danced at him.

The silence became heavily oppressive. Nothing happened. Apollonius sat gravely intent, his massive features like rock. Cleon shifted position restlessly, until Helen's foot touched his, and her smile warmed his heart, and he quite forgot what he was here for. He knew from her words that Apollonius had talked with her regarding this work and no doubt had extended his vague warnings.

He stiffened suddenly as her face blanched. Following her startled gaze, he looked at the ring inside the cup. It was moving. The cord on which it hung was swinging His eyes darted to their three hands, holding the three strands of the cord; not so much as a finger was twitching, and only a decided pull could have moved the cord—but the ring was swinging, swinging, circling ever wider and wider. . . .

"Ting!" With gentle tinkle, it struck the side of the cup.

"Write down the letter it touched," said Apollonius.

Cleon obeyed. The cord was spinning again, the brass ring was again in motion; it touched another letter, and continued its course. How did it move and why? There was none to answer. There was nothing to explain.

"Very curious," said Apollonius musingly. "I never played with this toy before. How the Egyptian priests could have used it, I cannot say, with the abundance of characters in their hieratic script. We have only twenty-four letters in Greek, yet they have barely enough space on that cup. . . . Cleon! What is written? What is the word?"

The cord had ceased its motion, the brass ring spun a little and hung quiet. Cleon looked at his tablets.

"Ask!" he said, impressed in spite of himself. "Just the one word—ask!"

"Very well," said the sage. "First, with whom are we speaking?"

Gradually the cord picked up motion, the ring swung, and began to strike the side of the bowl. Helen was watching, wide-eyed, startled, as those letters were touched. All three were spelling the words as they came —no need of the tablets now.

"The guard!" said Apollonius. "Very well, guard. We wish to speak with Pheidias the sculptor or with one of his masterworkmen. Can he speak with us?"

Almost at once the cord moved, the ring swung. Came only one word: "Wait."

THEY relaxed, stealing glances one at another. Apollonius smiled grimly as Cleon bent dark brows upon him in unuttered questions.

"Ask me not," he said. "Even to a Magus, a seer who knows all the mysteries, there are things too simple to be explained."

"You did not pull the cord," said Helen, wondering. "I watched. Nor did I. Nor Cleon. Who did, then?"

"Perhaps all three," said the sage quietly. "What does it matter, if answers come to what we ask? In the other world is no time or space, as we know them. Now take down the letters as they come, Cleon, for we shall need to refer to your tablets later. What is said will not be repeated. . . . With whom are we talking?"

The ring was swinging, gathering momentum, and this time it began to strike the cup more rapidly, with greater force. Came the answer: "Pheidias is here."

"We ask information," Apollonius said, as though to some other person before them. "In the name of the gods! Four pillars have been brought here from Tanis, to be erected, and yet—"

He broke off, as the ring swept into motion and interrupted him. Cleon sought in vain to pierce the mystery of this motion. That he was not causing it, he well knew. Nor was Helen, for she did not know how to write. Yet words came, and came fast. Apollonius, then? Those strong, beautiful old fingers were absolutely quiet; there could be no trickery here.

"I know," came the words on the tablets of wax. "I understand your problem. The answer is simple indeed. Each column needs

a pedestal in the form of a lotus-blossom, the petals rising to a height of four feet, the column rising from the center. Try it, Cleon. Make the sketch now, while I wait."

The ring fell motionless.

For the first time, Cleon felt a tingle of awe, of terror—drowned in a great wave of comprehension. Of course, of course! Feverishly he sketched an outspread lotus bud, half open, with the pillar rising from it—the lower tapering base concealed by the petals. The result was perfect.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "Look! It is the solution!"

The ring moved, the words came in reply. "Not quite. One petal too many."

"We thank you, Pheidias," said Apollonius. A light perspiration bedewed his wide brow. "We thank you humbly for coming."

For the last time, the ring moved and struck.

"All effort is progress. You have accomplished a thing, but whether for good or ill I know not. We are only men like you; death is but stepping through a door. Farewell."

The ring spun idly and fell into rest. There was a dull sound, as Helen fell half across the table, senseless. Cleon sprang to her side.

"Leave her be; she is not harmed," said Apollonius, wiping the sweat from his face. "It is only loss of energy. Well, you have your answer! Here, let me have charge of her. You have your own work. Go to it at once; time enough for love when success is won."

With sudden, unexpected show of strength, Apollonius lifted Helen in his arms and bore her from the room, calling his slaves.

Cleon hesitated. He snatched up his wax tablets and pouched them. Impulsively, he wrapped up the cup again, and with it the rod and cord and ring, and departed. He had implicit confidence that Helen was safe enough, since the sage so declared. As a matter of fact, he took the apparatus with him in order to examine it more closely for some sign of trickery. He could not believe what had happened. The wonder of it stupefied him.

Yet, working far into the night, sketching each of the four columns with a pedestal proportioned to receive it, he knew that the information given him was most exact. Before sunrise, he had drafted the pedestals, to be made in sections; every bit of his paper work was completed. An hour later he and a dozen stonecutters and apprentice sculptors were at work. The brass cup was laid away and, temporarily, forgotten.

TWO days later, he informed the council that the pillars would be unveiled for inspection at the end of a week. He worked day and night, toiling like any slave, at the task, hidden behind great canvas curtains which let no one observe what was going on. In the midst of this, he learned of the grief that had smitten the whole city—Apollonius, the Magus, the sage wise man famous throughout the whole world, was stricken and dying. Cleon rushed to his house, to find that Apollonius had passed away.

Now he flung himself even more furiously into the work. Three columns were up, the fourth was ready to be swung into place; on the morrow was to be the unveiling. Night came, and with a slave-gang Cleon labored until the fourth column was in place. The work ceased. Cleon bathed, and flung himself down on a pallet behind the canvas curtain. He slept, and dreamed of clashing weapons, and in his dream the wraith of old Apollonius came and looked sadly upon him, and passed on, silent.

He wakened suddenly. Someone was beside him; it was Helen.

"Up, up!" she was crying, tugging at him to waken him. "Quickly—there is no time!"

Bewildered, he sprang up. In the starlight she stood with sword in hand and shield on arm; he thought her a goddess at first.

"I have weapons—here is a sword for you, here another shield," she panted out. "I brought them from my father's house—quickly! They are coming—Thyrax and Captain Hiram and some of my father's slaves—one of your workmen talked, said that your work was done and would certainly win approval—they are coming to kill you—no time to escape—"

She was gasping for breath. Already the shuffling of sandaled feet echoed from the stones. Cleon leaped forth from behind the

canvas wall, and a yell greeted him; they were already rushing forward, there was not an instant to spare.

Helen moved out beside him, and the stabbing, shouting killers closed in. The steel swung and clashed; man after man fell away, hurt or maimed or dead, as the swords struck home—but before the noise of the tumult roused the town, the work was done. A spear struck Cleon down, and that was his death-wound. None knew Helen to be a woman, none knew her for what she was—and she, too, fell, her arms reaching for him in death. They lay thus together when the guards arrived and the slayers fled.

And they were buried thus together, in a tomb near the wondrous columns which made the city famous and caused men to come from afar to behold the temple and its pillars, like no others in the world heretofore. And when they were laid to rest, the cup in its wrappings was laid with them, for no one knew what it was and yet all guessed it to be some treasure of the dead architect.

This was the story that came from the notes, and Jasper Conkling nodded with delight as he read over the pages I handed him. It was not a happy story, and I said so.

"Bosh!" said Jasper Conkling. "Truth is seldom happy. You call the story unhappy. because the actors die. Well, doesn't everybody die?"

I let it pass to save argument. "However," I said, "this mentions the Greek alphabet as having twenty-four letters. I always understood it had twenty-six."

He got a book and looked it up. Very early Greek had sixteen; Greek of the period in the story, twenty-four. Later Greek, here and there, had twenty-seven.

"Anything else?" Jasper Conkling asked, with disagreeable triumph.

"Yes. Do you claim that these notes were supplied in the same manner used in the story—the dangling ring, and so forth?"

"Certainly," he rejoined. "And the other notes also—those dealing with the entire history of the cup, down to the time of Albertus Magnus."

"Then kindly explain the trick."

He regarded me gravely. "You have turned this first batch of notes into a story. You have here the words of Apollonius himself. Are they not sufficient?"

"No."

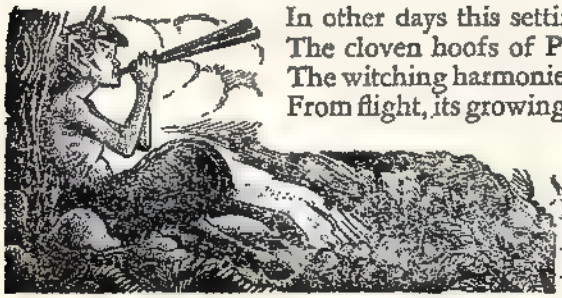
He shrugged. "Then, my friend, you must wait. You shall see the thing at work, you shall judge for yourself. Meantime, take with you the second chapter of these memoirs, which deal with the days of the Emperor Valens, and the references to historical works which actually mention the cup, and weave the next story in the chain. Will that be satisfactory?"

It was not, but for the moment it had to be.

Bewitched

By WILLARD N. MARSH

THIS timeless garden, like a thing diseased
Has flung a green veil round its leprous face
And deathless evil blooms are tightly squeezed
Within the unkempt vine's obscene embrace.

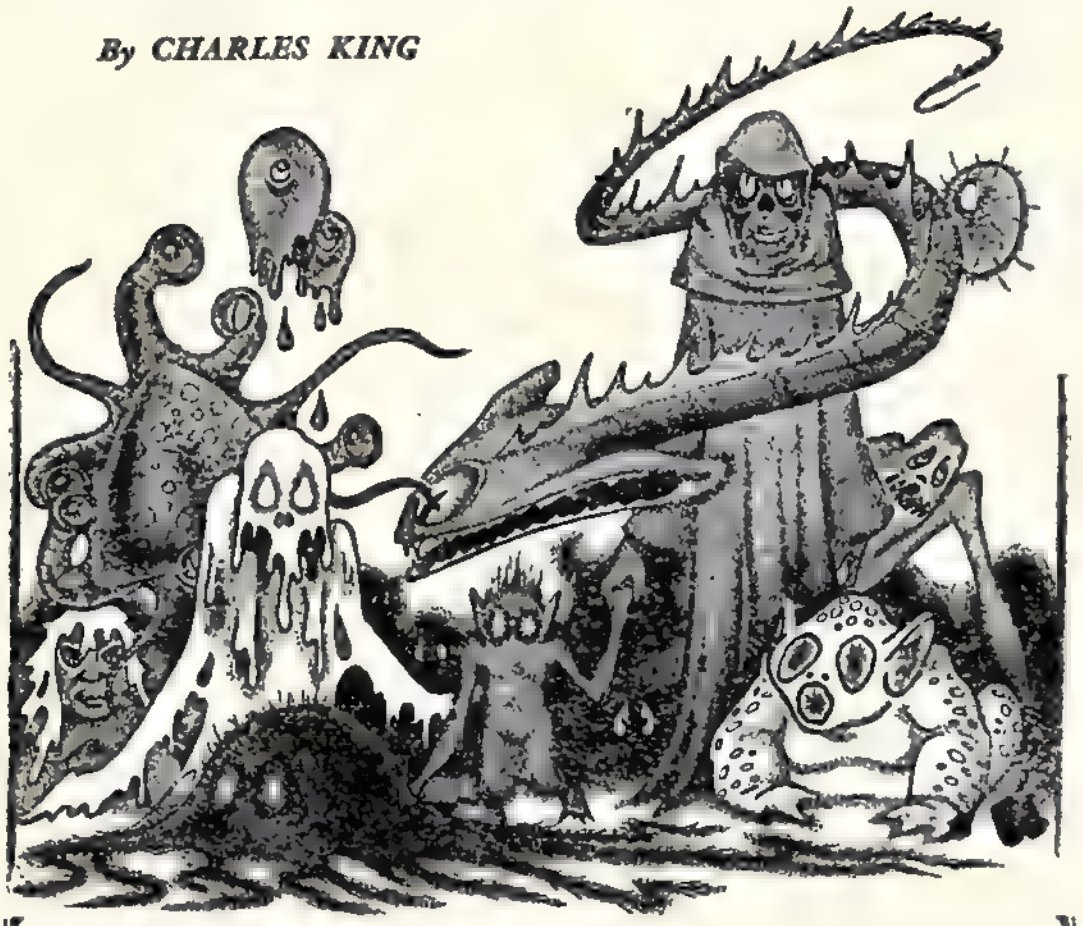


In other days this setting must have heard
The cloven hoofs of Pan, and as he spun
The witching harmonies that lured the bird
From flight, its growing for a time was done.

And now the whisper of a magic pipe
Has filtered through to me from yesterday:
An ancient, half-forgotten dream is ripe—
And caught, I grope and cannot find the way.

A Birthday Present for Tommy

By CHARLES KING



Here's a little girl . . . no parents, no home, not really; such a strange little girl. Aren't you curious. . . . ?

I AM a little girl. People say that I am small, even for my age. Sometimes when I walk in the park nearby to my house, well-meaning strangers will ask me if I am not afraid to be alone. I always answer "No," and it is the truth.

Maybe it isn't the complete truth because I am sometimes afraid at night. That is, unless I have company. I live by myself and the house does get kind of scary without company. I like company very much. . . .

"Hello, little girl."

"How do you do, sir."

"Dear me. But you *are* a polite little girl. . . ."

"Thank you, sir."

"How old are you, my dear?"

"How old do I look, sir?"

"Ha! Ha! Bears out my contention that a woman's a coquette no matter what her age. To please you, child, I'd say you were about twelve. And very pretty."

I made believe that I saw a friend of mine and went away. It is always about this time

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

that they start talking about my parents. That makes me very uneasy because I have no parents. And I just know that if I told that to a grownup there would be trouble. There would be more questions. And if they ever found out that I live alone . . . well, I just know they would take me away from my house. I would not like that. It does scare me when I am alone, but sometimes I have company. And that is nice. I remember Tommy. He was *very* nice. I will tell you about him. . . .

IT WAS about a month ago. I think it was a month. Time is funny. It is not always easy to remember.

I was walking along one of my favorite paths in the park. On a sunny day you can always find children there. It is fun to play with them. I can forget so many, many things when I play with them. But, even at my happiest, it is always saddening to know that I will see some of them for so very short a time. Even so, I must not depress myself. I promised to tell about Tommy, and I will. A ball came rolling along the walk. . . .

"Here is your ball, little boy. . . ."

"Huh. I'm not so little!"

"I'm sorry. I guess you're a pretty big boy."

"Sure, I am. And I'm strong, too."

"You must be. You threw that ball very far."

"I bet that girls can't throw like that."

"No . . . we can't. We learn different things. . . ."

"What kind of things?"

This would have been a very hard question to answer. There are many things you can tell little boys; there are so many things that one cannot. I have known many of them . . . very many . . . and yet each one thinks a little bit differently. That is where the danger lies. One cannot give the wrong answer because then they never trust you again. And yet one must have company. It is all quite tiring . . . and confusing. . . .

I was wondering just how to answer Tommy, when his governess ran up. She seemed most worried. And then she saw us together. She smiled, I suppose in relief, and then grew quite angry.

"Tommy! You are a bad, bad boy!"

"Why?"

"Because you ran away and I didn't see you."

"But I only was chasing my ball. . . ."

"Don't you know that there are bad people who steal little boys?"

"B-but I was only . . ."

"That will be enough, Tommy. On top of making me worry myself sick, you give me silly excuses. Little boys should always tell the truth."

"I am *not* little! I am almost seven years old, and . . ."

". . . and you are being very nasty to me. You . . . you are making me very unhappy. . . ."

You must agree that grownups are peculiar. Tommy's governess was worried about him. She said so. But when she found him she became angry. This has always been a grownup sort of reaction that has been very hard to understand . . . for a long, long time. . . .

Do you see what I mean?

"Who is this little girl?"

"She gave me back my ball."

"That was very kind of you, my dear."

"Thank you. I like to do nice things for other people . . . like Tommy."

"Oh, you know his name?"

"Not till now. You just mentioned it."

"What is *your* name?"

IT WAS a simple enough question. And yet, sometimes the simplest of questions are the hardest to answer. Haven't you found it so? Things that are hard you can somehow fight through, but, unless something warns you, it is the simple word that causes the most worry; makes you press your hands against your ears and pretend that you never heard the question. Bless little Tommy. He spoke up bravely as he could:

"She is my friend!"

"Of course, she is, Tommy. Let's all go back together and have her meet the rest of the children."

I was a bit worried. There were bound to be grownups as well as children, and grownups always get around to asking one's age. And though I have been answering that question for a long, long time, I am always thinking that some day I will be called a liar . . . and that somebody will start to in-

vestigate. The truth? Oh, no. I could never tell *that.*

There were little babies in carriages, and that also worried me. Babies are always frightened when they see me. Even those very new ones, that cannot see as yet, thrash their little limbs about when I am near. Sometimes they go into convulsions. Maybe it is because they have come only recently. Perhaps, in the world they left, they had much knowledge; and they haven't been in *this* world long enough to forget everything. They are dangerous. . . .

I left quickly, as soon as the first baby began to wail. But I promised Tommy I would play with him tomorrow.

AS I walked up the steps to my house I began to feel afraid. It is hard for me to describe this fear. It isn't just what grownups call an emotion. It is . . . it is . . . like something solid. I can feel this fear. I always have. I kept hoping that, this time, *they* would let me alone.

It was no use. As I walked into the house *they* all started talking at once.

"Where is our food?"

"You know we are hungry!"

"We haven't eaten in *weeks!*"

I was frightened. I always am because *they* have so much power. I tried not to look at them as I answered:

"It is very dangerous to feed you so often. The last time I nearly got caught."

They began again—but not talking this time. It was much more horrible. I will call it "laughing", even though it didn't sound at all like any of the different kinds of laughter you have ever heard. *They* do not know what laughter means. In fact, *they* have no idea of most of your emotions. *They* once knew, of course, but that was a long time ago. Now *they* just regard others as being useful. Like myself.

"Behold! The Little One is frightened."

"She is always frightened."

"I am hungry!"

One of them uncoiled from the high chandelier and dropped to the floor. The floor was uncarpeted but the great body made no sound. I have seen this happen thousands of times but I never get used to it.

I closed my eyes; but had to open them at once. *They* can make me do anything. The scaly, three-cornered head was swaying close to mine. Some of the eyes on the ends of the wobly tentacles were closed; but enough of them remained open, blinking at me. Enough, I mean, to keep me from moving.

"What are you afraid of, Little One?"

"Of people finding out about . . . about *me.*"

"Ah! You almost expressed fear that people would find out about *us!*"

FROM behind a picture hanging crookedly on the wall, a lot of thick, grayish liquid dripped down to the floor. It shivered a little bit and then changed into a hairy, ropy, horrible thing. It scuttled soundlessly across the floor and joined us. I tried not to look at it. I kept silent while *they* talked.

"Is the Little One becoming dangerous?"

"No. She cannot. You know that."

"We built her so long ago that sometimes I forget."

"We built her well—for our purpose."

"But have we blocked ourselves by our own cleverness? The Little One is a weak vessel at times."

"That is because we made her so. If she is to mingle with humans then she must appear to them as such. She must share their weaknesses."

I tried not to listen. *They* had talked this way many, many times. My eyes kept sliding to a pile of dirt in the corner. I should be used to it, by now; but my heart jumped with fright as a huge, red eye, dragging some disgusting threads of flesh, suddenly rolled out of the dirt. It joined the others. I could get used to the way they constantly change their shapes; it is just that *they* are so *quiet.*

Even with a whole roomful of them talking at once, their voices cannot be heard by anyone but me. That is the truth. And now the three of them were speaking in their soundless voices.

"It is too bad that we must depend upon the Little One for food. . . ."

"But we must. It is part of the agreement with *him.*"

"Yes—I know. And sometimes I think *he* got the best of the bargain."

"How can you tell? After all, the agreement is but a few thousand years old."

"You are right."

"And you must remember—in justice to *him*—that our method of eating gives us wondrous enjoyment. *He* tacked that on to the agreement."

"True. The vivid ecstasy of tasting food, while somebody else eats, is a never-ending source of new pleasures. . . ."

"And do not forget that the Little One, who eats for us, not only transfers the delightful sensations to us . . . but enhances our gratification with *her* sensations!"

"Hm-m. Perhaps we did get the best of the bargain."

"All this talk has made me hungrier than ever. . . ."

I wanted so badly to run away. Wanted it more than anything. Because I knew what was coming.

"Listen well, Little One."

"I listen. . . ."

"And?"

". . . obey!"

"Good. You will feed us tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night?"

"Yes. There must be no failure on your part."

"But. . . ."

"Yes?"

"N-nothing. I was just thinking. I met someone today. . . ."

"Excellent, Little One. That will make your task so much the easier."

I tried to go. But I couldn't. It meant *they* were not through talking to me. I always feel funny when I hear their voices. It is because their voices do not make any sound.

"Do not forget what we enjoy best, Little One."

"I . . . I will not forget."

"That is well. You once made a mistake. . . ."

"But that was long ago. So very long ago."

"We have not forgotten. Remember that!"

This time *they* let me go. As I turned, my eye caught a pretty shaft of moonlight coming through the window. *They* knew, immediately, that I enjoyed what I saw. So I was not surprised when the moonray was cut off. *They* simply blotted it out.

I suppose the reason is to save my emotions for the feasts. *All* my emotions are wanted then; for, at those times, *they* relish and savor my thoughts and feelings as much as the food I eat. You would find it very unpleasant to watch them the times that I eat. I think that you would go quite mad.

NEXT day I walked to the same spot in the park. Tommy was very happy to see me. And I was happy to see him.

"Hello, Tommy."

"Hello . . . gosh . . . gee!"

Tommy was so excited that he kept hopping from one foot to the other. He just couldn't keep his little body still. He tried to speak again, but spilled his words out so fast that it was impossible to understand him. So I spoke to him. I had to, anyway. There was so little time until tonight; and I had so much to do.

"What are you so excited about, Tommy?"

He couldn't help himself. He kept wiggling and wiggling. He hopped up and down. Then, finally he blurted:

"I'm seven years old!"

"No. Really?"

"Honest. It's my birthday today. I'm every bit seven years old."

I had to think very hard. This would make things much more difficult. But I knew I daren't fail. No. *They* wouldn't like it. Even thinking of it made me feel weak.

"Let's play catch, Tommy. I want to learn how to throw like you do."

"Sure, I'll show you. It's easy."

"Thank you, Tommy."

"Aw shucks. You're my friend, aren't you?"

"Yes, Tommy."

"Then why shouldn't I help you?"

I kept throwing the ball in such a way that we drifted apart from the other children and grownups. It was important. Dear little Tommy was very patient. He kept showing me what I was doing wrong. Over and over. When we were far enough away from the others I whispered to him:

"Do you know what's most fun to do on birthdays?"

"No. What?"

"Surprising people."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean playing tricks. Suppose we take a little walk and then come back to them from another direction."

"Oh boy! They wouldn't know *where* we came from. . . ."

"That's right. Wouldn't that be fun?"

His face fell. "My Mummy wouldn't like it. She always tells me never to go far away from my nurse. . . ."

"But, Tommy, you're not a little boy anymore. You're seven years old. And besides we won't go very far."

"You promise?"

"Of course. And then I've got my own surprise for you—"

"A present?"

I didn't answer him because it wasn't necessary. His mind was completely occupied with thinking about what I was going to give him.

AND now time was getting short. I knew that in a few minutes Tommy would be missed; and they would begin looking for him. By this time we were on the lane that leads out of the park and onto the avenue. A light breeze carried along a frightening message. Someone was already calling for Tommy.

As we left the park Tommy started to hang back.

"We're going too far."

"No, Tommy. We're only going to get your present. My house is very near."

"And then we'll go right back?"

"Right back"

"Good. I wouldn't want nurse to worry about me." His face was all lit up with eagerness as he trotted along next to me.

"Why are you walking so fast?"

"So that we can get back quickly."

At the house Tommy stopped. He bent his neck to one side. Then to the other. He was peering so hard that his eyes squinted up.

"What's the matter, Tommy?"

"I don't like this house. It's funny."

"But I live here. It's a pretty house."

"I don't care. It's funny."

In another minute Tommy would go chasing pell-mell down the street, back to the park. I quickly looked up and down the quiet side-street. It was absolutely deserted.

It came so fast that Tommy was only capable of an astonished squawk. I twisted one of his arms behind him and shot him up the steps and into the room.

And then he saw them.

His mouth opened. Shocked surprise left his eyes to be replaced by blank, unreasoning terror. A pulse in his temple began beating like a tiny hammer. Saliva started running out one corner of his mouth.

And then *they* were on him.

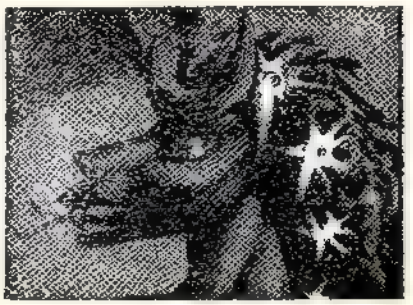
The room was filled with their shoutings and gigglings. But I knew that nobody outside could hear them. Only I can hear them.

Tommy was going fast. He was now in a corner, one hand held up before his eyes. His body was jerking faster and faster and a thin, steady whimpering fell from his wide-open mouth. Suddenly he fell. It was all over.

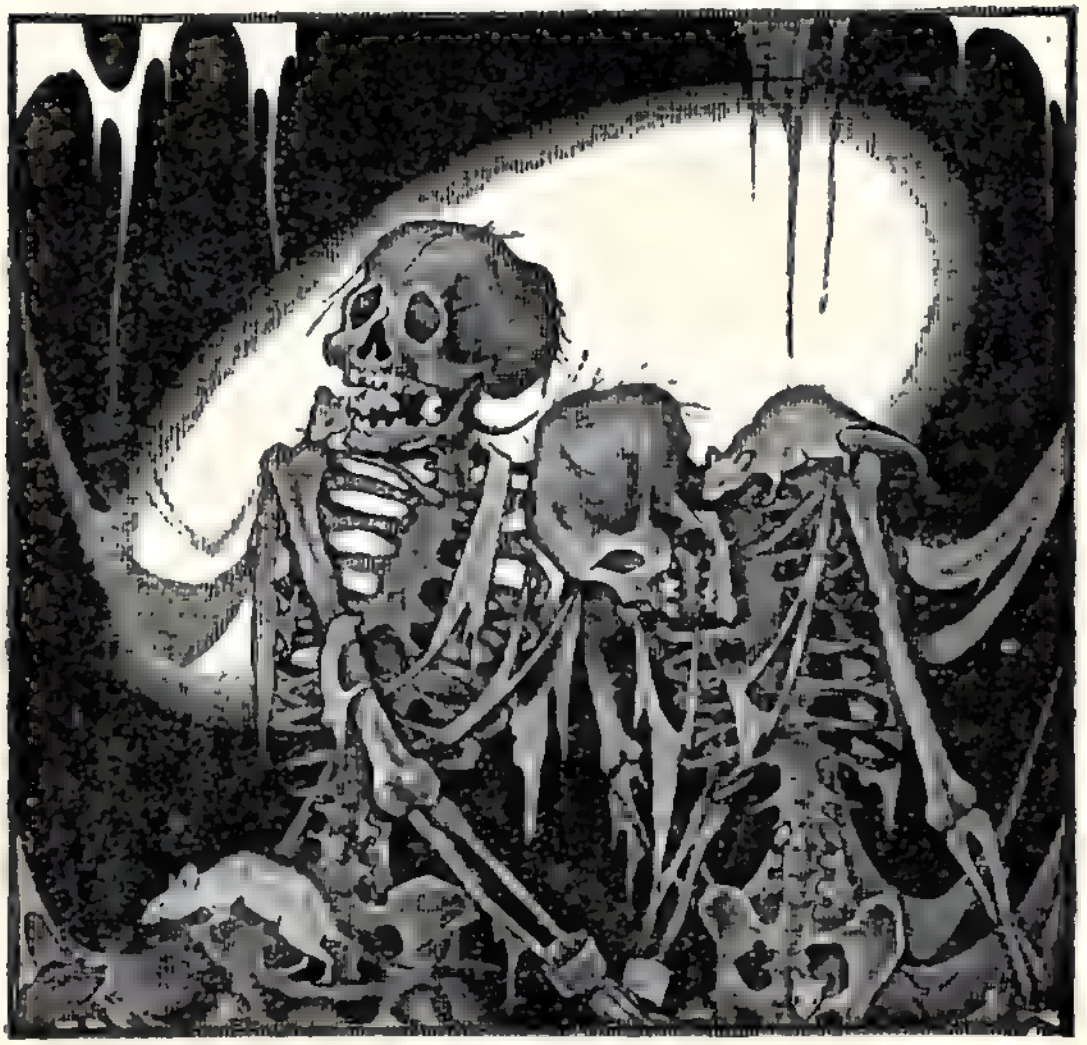
I knew what I had to do.

I hauled him to the center of the floor. Then *they* gathered around me in a circle. The room was filled with their noisy, hungry yelling. And yet the room was absolutely soundless. *They* were now ready to enjoy Tommy through me.

It was for me to begin the feast. . . .



The Peripatetic Corpse



By HAROLD LAWLOR

A corpse walks into a morgue, likes the place, decides to stay. Well, of course!

I HAD it bad.

My friends accuse me of enjoying these periodic black Irish moods, and that may be, but when I have 'em, I suffer. Noisily. I admit it makes it better when there's somebody around to watch me in these Hibernian death throes—which was why I was in fine form the night Great-uncle Judson again came into my life.

For Jim Murray was sitting opposite me on the sofa, and I, slumped despondently in my red leather lounge chair, yet had spirit

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

enough left to be giving a fine performance.

"You see before you," I groaned oratorically, "One-Shot Eddie Walsh, the boy Maugham. I'm gonna knock myself off."

"What, again?" said Jim, making the ice clink against his glass.

Try to get sympathy out of a doctor. Just try. Especially when he's young and still serving his interneship at the County Hospital, as Jim was.

I ignored him. I moaned, "What good is a writer who can't write?"

Jim sighed. "In fact, what good is a writer period."

"Oh, you can laugh," I said darkly. "But I'm through, finished, washed-up. Or I will be if I don't write another story soon, before editors forget me. If I could only think of an opening, will you? Doesn't anything weird ever happen down at that charnel house you work in?"

And that was what started it.

For Jim began grandly," If you're referring to the County—" And then he broke off, a strange expression on his face, and set his glass down very carefully on the coffee table (where it would leave a ring.) He started again.

"As a matter of fact," he said thoughtfully, "something peculiar did happen down there last night. What could you do with this? A corpse walks into our morgue, evidently likes the looks of the place, lays himself down in Drawer Eight, pushes the drawer shut, and apparently prepares to spend the rest of his life—I mean, death—right there."

I looked at Jim out of the corner of my eye. "Again?"

"I'm not clowning," Jim said. "That's just what happened, evidently. We have a corpse down there that must have walked in by itself. Because it wasn't there at five yesterday afternoon, but it was in Drawer Eight this morning at nine. And nobody knows how it got there. Nobody signed the body in. There's no record of it at all."

"Have your fun," I said generously.

"It's the truth," Jim said earnestly. "I swear it."

AND I believed him. At least to the extent that there actually was an unknown corpse found down in the morgue. But the incident didn't seem so terribly weird to me.

"Well," I said, "it's simple. A couple internes with what they think is a sense of humor got hold of a stiff some place and planted it there for a joke."

Jim shook his blond head stubbornly. "Show me the internes who'd do that, and keep their mouths shut afterward. The story would leak out somehow, and I'd have heard it. No, that corpse got in there through some other agency—granting that it didn't walk in by itself. And, of course, it couldn't have walked in by itself."

I was beginning to be interested. "Was it a man's body or a woman's?"

"A man's," Jim said. "About seventy years old, I'd say. Funny thing, he'd been embalmed, too. Rouge on his cheeks, lipstick on his mouth. You know the way undertakers duke 'em out."

"What are they going to do about him down there?"

Jim shrugged. "Try to trace him, I suppose. If they once get a line on him, he oughtn't to be hard to identify. Not with those birthmarks."

"Birthmarks?"

"M-h'm. Three V-shaped red ones, like birds in flight."

"Well, for God's sake!" I shouted crabbily. "I bit nicely that time, didn't I? Though how you ever learned about Great-uncle Judson's—"

But Jim was standing on his feet shouting crabbily at *me*. "You mean to tell me you know who he *is!*"

I wasn't getting this at all. Jim seemed to be deadly serious. I went on more quietly, "Listen, are you nuts, or am I? I'm talking about my Great-uncle Judson Worthen."

"I didn't even know you had a Great-uncle Judson Worthen." Jim was still crabby.

"Well, I did. And he had birthmarks—a good-sized V-shaped red one just above his left nipple, a smaller one above that, and a yet smaller one on his left shoulder. They looked just like three redbirds flying in formation."

Jim sank onto the sofa. "Then the body in the morgue is your great-uncle." He delivered his decision with an air of great authority.

But I was shaking my head. "No."

"You mean he's still living?" Jim asked.

"Nh-nh. But he's been under six feet of earth, out in Sleepmount Cemetery, since a year ago last September. I know, because I was at his funeral."

"Look," Jim said irritably. "Sure, we have a corpse at the morgue. But it couldn't be a year-and-a-half old corpse, for God's sake!"

"Well, you brought the subject up!" I was waxing peevish myself. "Of course, the corpse in the morgue can't be Great-uncle Judson. It's ridiculous!" My voice trailed away. Then I added tentatively, "Just the same—"

"Just the same—" Jim agreed.

There is such a thing as consuming curiosity. So, although it was eleven o'clock of a sweltering July night, Jim and I started for the morgue.

YOU know, it's all very well to be lighthearted and flippant and Irish—when you're sitting in the safety of your own living room, surrounded by all the accustomed familiar things of daily living.

But there's something about a morgue—

We didn't have any trouble getting in, even at that somewhat unusual hour, because they knew Jim, of course. There was a circular steel staircase winding down into dimness. On the left was a brick wall—painted once—scabrous now; on the right, a steel handrail. Both felt wet and slimy to the hand.

After that first touch, I jerked my hands away and folded my arms, and walked directly down the middle of the stairway behind Jim's broad shoulders. Better to risk breaking a leg, I thought, than touch that chill dampness again—so suggestive of death and the grave.

The farther down we descended the colder it grew. After the sultry heat upstairs, the clamminess here was enough to lay me out. The place was air-conditioned of necessity for the preservation of bodies.

I shivered. I remember I was wondering sourly what my curiosity would get me into next, when we reached the bottom of the steps. I slipped there, and would have fallen, but Jim's hand steadied me in the dim light. Then we went across the concrete floor and through a heavy steel door that clanged shut behind us with a decidedly unpleasant sound of finality.

"Are you sure we can get out again?" I asked. Not that I was nervous, but my heart seemed to be playing hopscotch in my chest.

"Sure. It doesn't lock." Jim grinned. "You superstitious Irish!"

"I'm not superstitious," I denied, not very convincingly. "I just don't believe in going around, slapping the face of Fate."

Big Jim wasn't listening. He was introducing me to the morgue attendant, Pete. If the old codger had ever had a last name, it was lost in the mists of antiquity. He looked as if he'd been down there since Lincoln freed the slaves. At any minute, you felt, he might crawl over and lay himself down on one of the marble slabs forever.

"Geez, what a cheerful place," I breathed, looking it over.

"You get used to it," Pete assured me. He went on chewing his gum, making a soft thucking sound in the awful stillness.

Jim and I stood there a minute, looking around. It was an old story to Jim, of course, but I was goggle-eyed.

Here in the morgue itself it was brightly lighted from a row of unshaded bulbs overhead. The plaster walls were painted white, where they weren't taken up with the square black numbered faces of the vaults. The place reminded you of the locker room in an athletic club. Only not for one little minute did you think you were in the locker room of an athletic club. You knew darned well where you were.

"How do you stand the smell?" I asked Pete, sniffing. The heavy odor of decomposition was cut through by the sharper one of disinfectants.

"Smells all right to me," Pete said defensively. Evidently I'd hurt the old boy's pride.

"Where's the smoke who got his neck carved?" Jim asked at a tangent.

"Three," Pete said succinctly.

Jim went over and pulled out drawer three. I guess I must have shut my eyes for a minute. If there was anything I didn't want to see just then, it was a man, black or white, with a cut throat. But when I opened my eyes again I saw that Jim was only horsing around. Drawer three was empty, and

Jim was eyeing me. And he and Pete were purple with suppressed mirth. I suppose I'd turned white as a sheet.

"For gosh sake, Jim!" I protested weakly. "Let's see this unknown corpse you were talking about, and then let me out of here."

"Say, Doc," Pete put in. "Will you hang around for a while, so's I can go up and get a beer?"

Before I could stop either of them, Jim nodded and Pete was gone. We'd have to wait until he came back. I gave Jim a dirty look, but he didn't see it. He was walking over to Drawer 8, and reluctantly I followed him.

I even managed to keep my eyes open when he pulled out the drawer.

WELL, it was Great-uncle Judson Worthen, all right. But it was anybody's guess as to how he'd pushed up six feet of heavy clay and hied himself eight miles across town from Sleepymount Cemetery to take up his abode in the County Morgue. Personally, if I were Uncle Judson I'd have stayed where I was. There was nothing about the County Morgue, that I could see, to give anyone a sentimental attachment to the place.

I was thinking nonsense, of course. The fact is, though I was trying to bear up nobly under Jim's gaze, I was scared stiff. And my feelings were harrowed, my sense of the fitness of things outraged. I remembered that interment, so many months before—the slow descent of the casket, the desolate thuds of those first handfuls of earth tossed into the yawning grave. Burial should be the final end, and the grave itself held inviolate.

But now, inexplicably, here was the body of Great-uncle Judson once more!

I didn't like any of this. I didn't want any part of it. My hair felt as if it were trying to stand up vertically, and icy chills were leaping up my spine and seemed to be spraying out fan-like over my head. I was surprised Jim couldn't see them.

I looked down at the cadaver. It was nude where we'd pulled down the sheet to see the three redbirds flying across the withered chest.

"He was wearing a black suit when he was buried," I said.

Jim nodded. "He had it on when we found him this morning. They took it off and covered him with the sheet."

There was something pathetic about that defenseless body. I felt a growing anger inside. I said, "It's ridiculous to think he got over here by himself. Some ghouls must have dug him up, the—" I choked. "They might have let him rest in peace."

Jim nodded again, but absently. "What's that rope in his hands? We left it there, but it puzzled us."

I knew what he meant. "It's a Chinese prayer string. Something like a rosary, you know, only with knots instead of beads. I put it in his hands myself at—at the time he was laid out."

We left the drawer open, and walked over toward the steel door by which we'd entered. We were both trying to think, and I suppose the idea of walking was automatic and natural. We stood there, with our backs to Uncle Judson Worthen's corpse.

"Strange the body's in such a perfect state of preservation," Jim muttered. "It's unnatural."

"The thing is," I said helplessly, "what's to be done now?"

Jim rubbed his forehead. "You've identified him. I suppose in the morning you'll have to get a burial permit and rebury him. Though how we're going to explain all this—"

I didn't know myself. It was the strangest set-up I'd ever encountered. But the worst was not yet. The worst happened immediately.

Some movement behind me, perhaps, caused me to turn my head. And I think the only reason I didn't start screaming like a siren was because the breath was completely knocked out of me by what I saw. My hand clawed at Jim's shoulder and he, too, turned. We both turned stiff as any body in one of those lockers.

For the corpse of Judson Worthen had somehow got itself up from the marble slab upon which it had been lying, and was standing now beside the open drawer!

What's more—*it started walking!*

Walking—if you could call such horrible progress that.

A semi-circular sway backward; a lurch as the right leg described another half-circle, back to the front; a thud as the naked right

foot finally landed on the cement floor.

Each movement took long seconds. Then the left leg began its dreadful mechanical stagger.

Sway, lurch, thud! Sway, lurch—

The cadaver had taken three of these terrible strides while Jim and I stood, shoulder to shoulder, frozen to the cement floor. Sheer panic terror gripped us then, and we both turned on one impulse to flee blindly from the horror that was coming at us.

But before we could yank the heavy metal door open, reason re-asserted itself. We stopped, and looked in each other's eyes. And behind us the awful footsteps thudded on.

We said it together. "We've got to stop him."

IT WASN'T easy to put that resolve into execution. But we didn't even wait for the corpse to approach us. We walked slowly toward it, our hearts banging like trench mortars. Jim's breath was sobbing wheezily through his nostrils; I could hardly see for the cold sweat that was pouring down from my forehead.

We didn't know what would happen. Great-uncle Judson's eyes were open now, staring fixedly at a point above our heads. As if, before his blank gaze, were held up the alluring picture of the destination he was trying to reach. And he kept on walking toward us as though his legs were obeying the injunction of some fearsome, detached intelligence.

He paid no attention to us, seemed not to see us at all. Perhaps it was this that gave us courage.

Gingerly approaching him on each side, Jim and I each took hold of one of his arms. It wasn't that Uncle Judson tried to resist; it was, rather, that he kept on walking irresistibly. Or attempted to. But we were too much for him. Though we could feel the body exerting a steady pressure against our restraining hands, we half-carried, half-led it back to Drawer 8. We lifted it to place it on the marble slab it had so recently vacated, drew up the sheet again, and closed the drawer.

We stood there for minutes, half-expecting, I think, to see it open again. But it didn't. Not then.

"Come on," Jim said finally. "Let's get out of here."

He sounded as exhausted as I felt. As we opened the heavy steel door, we heard Pete clattering down the steps.

"Better not tell Pete what we've seen," Jim warned.

But he needn't have said it. I wasn't sticking my neck out by telling Pete what we'd witnessed. "Not," as I pointed out reasonably, "when the Psychopathic Hospital is only a stone's throw away."

Jim nodded solemnly.

"Whew!" I said, after I'd gratefully gulped the third double-brandy. We'd driven to a tavern Jim knew of, a few blocks away. "Now what was that all about? Do you suppose Uncle Judson isn't—isn't dead?"

"The hell," Jim said, injured. "What kind of doctor do you think I am? I know a corpse when I see one."

I knew I was raving. Hadn't I, myself, attended the burial of Uncle Judson, a year ago last September? Of course, he was dead.

"Maybe we didn't see it. Him walking, I mean." I was gibbering and I knew it. "Could those bright lights have hypnotized us, kind of, so that we dreamed it all?"

"Maybe you were dreaming," Jim said. "*I* was wide awake."

Well, there it was. I remember thinking dazedly that it was no wonder writers steered away from something that happened in real life when they tried to plot a story. Fiction, straight, was believable. Actual events were often incredible. Here was something which, if I tried to write it, no one would believe. I wouldn't believe it myself. Only it *happened* to me!

"What kind of man was this great-uncle of yours?" Jim broke into my harried preoccupation with my thoughts.

"I hardly know myself." I circled my glass on the bar nervously. "We weren't very close, even though I was his only heir. He was very wealthy when he was young. Traveled all over the world. Had his own yacht in those days. He was hard, selfish, uncompromising. Very introverted. I doubt if anyone ever knew him well—not even his wife. Although he was her brother, my grandmother used to say the only decent thing about him was that he never broke a

promise. If he made one he kept it religiously, at no matter what cost or effort to himself."

"What happened to his wife?" Jim asked. "She died?"

I shrugged. "My grandmother told me only a little. But she was supposed to have run off with Uncle Judson's secretary. They say she was very beautiful. Her name was—Yasmini."

"Yasmini!" Jim was owl-eyed.

"I know." I nodded. "It all sounds impossibly romantic. He was on his third cruise around the world, and picked her up some place in Asia Minor. They'd only been home three months or so when she ran away. After that he never spoke of her, or permitted anybody else even to mention her name.

He just went on living alone in that house he finally left to me. You may have seen it—that place that looks like a Chinese tenement, sprawling all over the hill north of town?"

"You mean that's yours now? I've seen it. I thought it was an abandoned asylum of some sort."

"It's a rabbit warren," I admitted. "I wouldn't live in it myself, and nobody in his right mind would buy it. There must be fifty rooms in it. Before he went broke, Uncle Judson was always adding new wings and additions to it."

"But why—if he lived there by himself?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe because it gave him something to do—after Yasmini ran away."

I stood up. I felt as if I hadn't slept in a month. We separated, with a promise to meet in the morning. Then I'd have to do something about Great-uncle Judson's body, unpleasant as the whole thing might be.

I must have lain awake till four or five o'clock that morning, my mind going in crazy circles.

Why was Uncle Judson wandering around? Where was he going? The cemetery was south of town, the morgue in the middle, and Uncle Judson's former home outside the city limits on the north. Had he been heading for there, for some unexplained reason? And if so, why should he stop over at the morgue? Unless, at nightfall, he had to be with his own kind—like a vampire in reverse. (They slept days, or so I'd been told.)

But the more I thought of this theory, the more reasonable it seemed. And if the house was his ultimate goal, there was nothing to prevent me from going out there myself in search of any possible clue I might find as to what was drawing him there so irresistibly.

I turned over on my side then, determined to wait for what the morning would bring.

The morning brought murder.

THE sound of a bell woke me at nine. I reached sleepily for the alarm, but it was the phone. Jim's voice—sharp, unlike his normal tones—shocked me into complete wakefulness.

"Get down here right away! I'm at the hospital." And he hung up before I could ask him what was the matter.

I found him in the lobby of the County Hospital, pacing impatiently, but he steered me out again almost before I'd got through the door.

"We can't talk here," he said. "Come on."

We went to a place, half-restaurant, half-tavern, deserted except for ourselves at this hour of the morning. We sat in a torn leather booth at the rear, and ordered coffee, before Jim said anything. Then his face haggard, his eyes bloodshot, he said, "Pete was murdered some time last night."

"Pete?"

"The morgue attendant," Jim said. "He was strangled."

My spoon hit the linoleum table-top, bounced to the floor. "Go on," I said. I knew that wasn't all. There was something in Jim's face.

"Drawer Eight was found open," he said slowly. "And your uncle's body is gone."

"Who'd steal a body from the morgue?" I said irritably. "Or strangle Pete to do it?"

But Jim was eyeing me carefully. "I don't think anyone did."

I got it, then. What he was driving at. "You think Uncle Judson—"

Jim nodded. "From the marks on Pete's throat, it looks as if he was strangled with that Chinese prayer string. The pressure was so great that the skin was broken and blood was drawn. The prayer string is gone.

And there's something else—the black suit your uncle was wearing originally is missing."

"I see." I moistened my dry lips. "You think Uncle Judson started walking, and—Pete tried to stop him. And Pete was old and little and no match for—"

Jim nodded. "But that isn't what's bothering me most. Wait till the police learn, as they surely will, that we were the last ones down there with Pete."

I thought about that for a while. We could never explain or make anybody believe what we'd seen. Then something else occurred to me, and I drew in my breath sharply. "Jim, where is Uncle Judson now? And what if somebody else tries to stop him from walking?"

So there it was. We couldn't very well tell the police such a preposterous yarn. But we certainly couldn't sit idly by while a murderous corpse ran amok. Yet what were we to do about it?

I told Jim of the theory I'd evolved during my sleepless night, but if he was enthusiastic about it he hid it well. Still, since there seemed nothing better to do and he had the day off from the hospital, he agreed to go out to Uncle Judson's place with me.

THE house must have covered acres, and was the craziest mixture of unrelated architectural styles you ever saw. The main facade was red brick, and went on from there—stucco, half-timber, fieldstone, frame, or what have you? Wherever Uncle Judson had felt the urge to make an addition he made it, using whatever materials the contractor of the moment had at hand.

I'd never been entirely through the place myself, and Jim, having his first close-up view, was frankly flabbergasted.

"Looking for a clue in that," he jerked his head at the sprawling mass, "is going to take months."

Secretly I agreed with him, but the thing was to prove simpler than we'd feared.

For Uncle Judson had left a wide trail.

We left the car under the porte-cochere and entered the hall. The furniture had not been removed—only covered with dust sheets. The furnishings were as fantastic as the house itself, and the first thing we saw as we entered was the bronze statue of a nymph. I remembered her from an earlier visit. She had stood at the foot of the stairs, holding a string of electric bulbs aloft. But now she was fallen from her marble pedestal and lying prone on the dusty floor.

Jim pointed to the door and I nodded. Long parentheses in the dust showed where Uncle Judson's lurching feet had passed. The statue must have stood in the way of his swaying progress and been knocked down. Or so we reasoned, from the signs before us.

We went into the drawing room. Here a delicate gilt chair was on its side, its dust cover awry. Smaller pieces of furniture lay toppled over. A huge terra cotta jardiniere and the teakwood table which had held it were smashed beyond repair. At the far end of the room, a portiere was half-dragged from its rod.

We followed the trail, through room after amazing room, bringing up at last in the barn-like kitchen. Here a door—leading to the cellars, evidently, from the dank air that blew upward—stood open.

While Jim waited, I went back to the car for a flashlight. Then, slowly, we descended the steps leading to the cellars.

And here we drew a blank. For the floor of hard-packed earth betrayed no footsteps, and the vast reaches of the place itself were discouraging. But we didn't give up. We'd gone this far and we'd seen what we both believed to be definite proof of Uncle Judson's recent presence.

Doggedly, we searched for hours. The cellars, like the house above, were divided into rooms—some small, some so huge that the far walls of the room evaded the rays of the flashlight and remained in inky gloom.

But, except for the usual debris of such places, the cellars contained nothing that seemed significant.

Where was Uncle Judson? And what had led him here?

It was Jim, at last, who all unknowingly solved the problem.

Pausing in the search long enough to light a cigarette, Jim leaned back wearily against an empty tier of shelves lining the wall of the main room. And the shelves swung inward on a pivot.

Jim fell flat on his back. I think he was stunned for a minute by the suddenness

of it all—I know—I was—but he scrambled quickly to his feet. Together we propped the door open with a heavy case, passed through, and entered what seemed to be a long tunnel carved out of solid white limestone.

I remember we stood there just inside the tunnel, while I played the flashlight around on the walls, ceiling, and floor. All seemed to be dripping with moisture, but the air was fairly fresh, indicating shafts some place leading to the outer air.

Somehow, I felt that this tunnel was going to lead to something unpleasant. But Jim and I exchanged glances, and there was in both our faces a grim determination to see this thing through to the end.

We started down the tunnel, slowly, because the rough limestone floor made our footing precarious. I don't know at just what point the conviction seized me, but it wasn't long before I knew we were no longer under the house.

"I hope the flashlight doesn't go out," Jim whispered once.

The same thought had just been occurring to me. But neither of us suggested turning back. We kept on.

Until at last we came to the end of the tunnel, came to where it broadened out, but not very much, into a chamber hewn from the solid rock. Two huge steel doors that, when closed, could shut the chamber off from the rest of the tunnel were folded back now against either wall. And there, facing us, was yet another segment of what seemed to be a patternless puzzle.

But, though the scene was macabre in the flashlight's yellow glow, I knew no feeling of terror. Only a sick pity.

Two skeletons—obviously, from their size, those of a man and woman—sat together on a stone ledge jutting out from the far wall facing us. Rusty chains ran from their handcuffed wrists through iron rings in the wall behind them. From the ceiling of the chamber depended a naked electric light with a pointed bulb of the old-fashioned variety, long since burned out.

I swung the flashlight around. It was only then that I noticed the doors. Those doors, I reasoned, that up until a few short hours before, had been sealed and locked for many, many years. On their inner surfaces —the sides that would face the skeletons when they were closed—were painted in red letters the words:

"When I am dead, Yasmini, then you shall be free."

Jim saw the words, too. *"Yasmini!"* he whispered. "But—the other?"

I knew. It took no great wit to know. I said slowly, "I'm afraid Yasmini didn't run away with Uncle Judson's secretary. Or, at least, not very far. Uncle Judson must have grown suspicious, and he took his own revenge."

For surely this was his doing, these were his words here on the doors—a cruel answer, perhaps to Yasmini's frantic plea for freedom?

By the flashlight's rays, I saw that the upper half of the man's skelton was bent over the other, as if he'd tried to shut out from her eyes with his own body the horror of the fate that was slowly to overtake them, there in the lighted tomb. Perhaps to shut out, too, the promise of Uncle Judson's mocking there in its letters of fire:

"When I am dead, Yasmini, then you shall be free."

A taunting promise. But a promise. And Uncle Judson had never been known to break a promise.

Jim and I stared at the tiny, once-lovely hand of Yasmini still clasped in the man's larger one. And I was hoping desperately that she had died before him, that she had not lived on, perhaps for hours or days, alone with the body of her dead lover, and —terror.

Jim and I turned away to examine the doors. The huge lock that had been used to fasten them on the outer side was covered with mold of a brilliant emerald-green color. And there was no key. But the doors were open now. Yasmini was free.

One last glance into the death chamber, subdued and a little sickened, then we retraced our steps back through the cellars, the house, to the car.

"I DON'T understand," Jim said numbly, in the car. "I don't understand."

Neither did I. But then who could? Who does know anything of the mystery that lies beyond life? Of the forces that operate there?

"It seems obvious enough," I said, "that Great-uncle Judson made a promise. And came back to keep it."

"But why wait till now?" Jim added. "He died nearly two years ago. Why did he wait until now?"

I could only guess, of course. But so deep was my conviction that I was right, that I wouldn't have called it guesswork at all.

"Perhaps, ordinarily, no one could come back from the grave to unlock that door. Perhaps, though, the desire to do so was so strong in Uncle Judson that it became a live thing, an animus, a living spirit strong enough to re-animate the body and sent it here to fulfill its promise."

But Jim was less haggard now. He was the hard-headed realistic doctor once more. He stared at me, disgusted. "And then again, perhaps we didn't see that corpse walking. Perhaps it wasn't the body of your Uncle Judson. If it was, where is he now?"

I didn't know. But I thought I could guess.

"Perhaps," Jim finished. "Perhaps we're crazy—suffering from an hallucination more real than life itself."

The police, as we were so soon to learn, agreed with him.

FOR, as Jim had feared, the police learned of our last night's visit to the morgue. And when they were unable to find us that day, because we'd gone to Uncle Judson's house, warrants for our arrest were sworn out. They thought we'd committed murder, then fled.

And here, they reasoned now at our reappearance, were the fugitives returned to give themselves up.

Questioning, then. Endless hours of it, led by a lieutenant from the Homicide Bureau, Fitzjames. They questioned us separately and together, but they couldn't shake our story. Nor could we convince them we were speaking the truth.

A corpse murdered Pete? A walking corpse? You wouldn't try to kid us, would you?

A detail went out with us to Uncle Judson's house, and found that part of our story true as we'd described it—the tunnel, the chamber, the skeletons.

And so what? What did that prove?

It was then—weary, defeated—that I finally made my request. A request I firmly believed would be denied, but surprisingly was not.

"You want us to exhume the body of your great-uncle?" Lieutenant Fitzjames asked softly. After what appeared to be a moment of startled thought he smiled thinly, and stopped tapping his pencil against the thumb of his left hand. "Okay, we'll get in touch with the coroner's office."

I was incredulous. "You mean—you're really beginning to believe me at last?"

Lieutenant Fitzjames continued to smile unpleasantly. "I'm giving you rope enough to hang yourself, buddy. You and your pal. Either we're going to find your uncle's grave disturbed and indications that you recently planted some incriminating evidence there, or else—"

"Or else?" Jim and I said it together.

"Or else we're going to find your uncle's body in a normal state of decomposition—which will knock your nutty story into a cocked hat."

But by that time I was too dull and numb to be alarmed. God knows what I expected Uncle Judson's grave to reveal when I made my request for an exhumation. But the thing had started there, and if it was to have any ending—any hope of salvation for us—it seemed reasonable, even in my present state of despair, to believe it was there that we would find it.

And I remember on that ride to Sleepymount Cemetery, all I could think of was the steel doors of Yasmini's living tomb, and the relentless lock that had held them closed, covered with mold of a venomous brilliant green. A color that would be to me always the color of death.

LIEUTENANT FITZJAMES smiled a little as we stood under the granite shaft marking the grave of my Great-uncle Judson Worthen. Smiled, for the ground quite evidently had never been disturbed since the interment, nearly two years before.

"Well," Fitzjames said grimly, "it won't be a question of planted evidence. Nor grave-robbers."

One of the men examined the sod carefully. Cemetery workers thrust a spade into the solid earth.

"No digging here for months," was the verdict. The grave had never been disturbed since the burial. They'd swear to it—in any court.

FITZJAMES was satisfied. "Dig!" he ordered.

I couldn't watch those busy spades. Once I looked at the stars. Another time I stole a glance at Jim's haggard face, and read in his hopeless eyes what I knew must be in mine.

The fear that all this would lead to nothing that could help us, that whatever we'd seen last night in the morgue had not been the body of Uncle Judson.

And then at last the cement burial vault was raised. And there was a grim look of satisfaction on Fitzjames' face as the seal was broken. It had not been tampered with, until now. The casket lid, next. The crowding forward of witnesses.

Lieutenant Fitzjames was fumbling for his handkerchief, then, wiping the sweat jerkily from his forhead.

Great-uncle Judson's face, serene and quite unblemished, was revealed in the light of the dark lantern. He was decently clad once more in his black suit. And did I imagine it, or was there a smile of contentment on those thin lips?

I remember Fitzjames removing the Chinese prayer string from the stiff fingers. Remember him muttering, "We'll check the bloodstains at the laboratory."

I knew it would prove to be Pete's blood (as later, in fact, it did.) And I knew that Jim and I were free, for no earthly power could have insinuated that recently used prayer string into an untouched grave.

But now none of this mattered.

For Jim and I were staring at that other thing in Uncle Judson's hand—that great key covered with mold of a brilliant venomous green—a color that would always remind me of death.

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The Shonokins

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

LESS than five persons have ever seen John Thunstone frankly, visibly terrified, and less than two have lived through subsequent events to tell about it. Fear he knows and understands, for it is his chief study; but he cannot afford it very often as a personal emotion.

And so he only smiled a little that afternoon in Central Park, and the hand at which Sabine Loel, the medium clutched was as steady as the statue of Robert Burns under which she had asked him to meet her. A few snowflakes spun around them, settling on their dark coats. "I say that you are in more than mortal danger," she repeated breathily. "I would not have dared recall myself to your attention for anything less important."

"I believe that," smiled Thunstone, remembering when last they met, and how he had demonstrated to her complete satisfaction the foolish danger of calling up evil

It is said that living Shonokins fear and avoid only dead Shonokins. . . .

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

spirits without being ready to deal with them. Not one ounce of his big powerful body seemed tense. His square face was pale only by contrast to his black eyes and black mustache. Not even his restraint seemed overdone.

"Whatever you think of my character, you know that I'm sensitive to spirit messages," she went on. "This one came without my trying for it. Even the spirit control that gave it was in horror. The Shonokins are after you."

"I might have known that," he told her. "After all, I acted with what they might consider officious enmity. I stopped them, I hope, from a preliminary move back toward the world power they say they held before human history began. A Shonokin died, not by my hand but by my arrangement, and his body was buried at a place where I want them never to come—living Shonokins, it seems, avoid only dead Shonokins. Their very nature forces them to strike back at me. But thank you for the warning."

"You think," ventured Sabine Loel, "that I want to be your friend?"

"You do, though your purpose is probably selfish. Thank you again. Now, I never had any malice toward you—so, for your own safety, won't you go away and stay away? Avoid any further complication in—in what's to happen between me and the Shonokins."

"What precautions—" she began to ask.

"Precautions against the Shonokins," explained Thunstone patiently, "are not like precautions against anything else in this world or out of it. Let them be my problem. Good-by."

Going, she looked back once. Her face was whiter than the increasing snowflakes. Thunstone filled his pipe with tobacco into which were mixed one or two rank but significant herbs. Long Spear, the Indian medicine man, had told him how much such things did to fight ill magic.

THUNSTONE was living just then in a very comfortable, very ordinary hotel north of Times Square. He entered the lobby confidently enough, and rode up in the elevator without seeming to be apprehensive. But he paused in the corridor outside his own door as cautiously as though about to assail an enemy stronghold.

He bent close to the panels without touching them. Earlier in the day he had closed and locked that door from outside, and had dripped sealing wax in three places at juncture of door and jamb, stamping the wax with the crusader's ring he habitually wore. The wax looked undisturbed, its impress of the cross of Saint John staring up at him.

With a knife-point he pried the blobs away. They had not been tampered with in the least. Inserting his key in the lock, he let himself in and switched on the lights in the curtained sitting room.

At once he started back against the inner side of the door, setting himself for action. His first thought was that two men were there, one prone and one standing tensely poised. But, a hair-shaving of time later, he saw that these were dummies.

The reclining dummy was made of one of Thunstone's suits and a pillow from the bed in the next room. It lay on its back, cloth-stuffed arms and legs outflung. A tightly looped necktie made one end of the pillow into a headlike lump, and on this had been smudged a face, crudely but recognizably that of John Thunstone. Ink from the stand on the desk had been used to indicate wide, stupid eyes, a slack mouth under a lifelike mustache—the expression of one stricken instantly dead. The other figure stood with one slippered foot on the neck of the Thunstone effigy. It was smaller, perhaps a shade under the size of an average man. Sheets and towels and blankets, cunningly twisted, rolled and wadded together, made it a thing of genuinely artistic proportion and attitude. A sheet was draped loosely over it like a toga, and one corner of this veiled the place where a face would be.

"Substitution magic?" said Thunstone under his breath. "This is something that's going to happen to me. . . ." He turned toward the desk. "What's that?"

On the desk seemed to crouch a little pixy figure. Made from a handkerchief, like a clever little impromptu toy to amuse a child, it looked as though it pored over an open book, the Gideon Bible that is an item in every hotel room. Stepping that way,

very careful not to touch anything. Thunstone bent to look.

The book was open to the Prophet Joel, second chapter. Thunstone's eye caught a verse in the middle of the page, the ninth verse:

> They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.

THUNSTONE has read many books, and the Bible is one of them. He knew the rest of the frightening second chapter of Joel, which opens by foretelling the coming of terrible and ungainsayable people, before which no normal creature could stand. "They enter in at the windows like a thief," he repeated, and inspected his own windows, in the sitting room and the adjoining bedroom. All were closed, and the latches still bore blobs of wax with his seal.

These phenomena had taken place, it remained to be understood, without the agency of any normal entry by normal beings. Movement and operation by forces at a distance—telekinesis was the word for it, fondly used by Charles Richet of France, and tossed about entertainingly by the Forteans and other amateur mystics. Thoughts crossed Thunstone's mind, of broken dishes placed in locked chests by Oriental fakirs and taken out mended; of Harry Houdini's escapes and shackle-sheddings, which many persons insisted were by supernatural power; of how the living body of Caspar Hauser had so suddenly flicked into existence, and of how the living body of Ambrose Bierce had so suddenly flicked out. There were a variety of other riddles, which many commentators purported to explain by the overworked extra-dimensional theory. Somebody or something, it remained, had fashioned a likeness of his own downfall in his own sitting room, without getting in. Again approaching the desk without touching the Bible or the little figure crouched beside it, Thunstone drew out a drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

The top sheet was a second or third carbon of his own typescript. Other copies of this sheet were sealed in various envelopes with equally interesting documents, placed here and there in the custody of trusted allies, each envelope inscribed *To be opened only in the event of my death—John Thunstone.* The knowledge that such collections existed was a prime motive of some of Thunstone's worst enemies to keep him alive and well. There was Sabine Loel's warning, for instance. . . . Sitting down well away from the grotesque tableau, Thunstone glanced over his own grouping of known and suggested facts about the Shonokins.

Those facts were not many. The Shonokins were, or said they were, a people who had been fortuitously displaced as rulers of America by the ancestors of the red Indians. A legend which they themselves insisted upon was that ordinary human evolution was one thing and Shonokin evolution another. They hinted here and there at tokens of long-vanished culture and power, and at a day soon to come when their birthright would return to them. To Thunstone's carbon were appended the copy of a brief article on the "Shonokin superstition" from the Encyclopedia of American Folkways; a letter from a distinguished but opinionated professor of anthropology who dismissed the Shonokins as an aboriginal myth less well founded than Hiawatha or the Wendigo; and Thunstone's own brief account of how someone calling himself a Shonokin had made strange demands on the Conley family on a Southern farm, and of what had befallen that same self-styled Shonokin.

Finishing the study of his own notes, Thunstone again regarded the grouped dummies, which he had thus far forborne to touch.

The standing figure, with its foot on the neck of the Thunstone likeness, had hands that thrust out from under its robe. They had been made of a pair of Thunstone's own gloves, and on closer scrutiny proved to be strangely prepared. The forefinger and middle finger of each had been tucked in at the tip, so that the third fingers extended longest. The only Shonokin that Thunstone had ever met had displayed third fingers of that same unnatural proportion. Thunstone nodded to himself, agreeing that this was plainly the effigy of a Shonokin. He turned his mind to the problem of why the images had been thus designed and posed.

A simple warning to him? He did not think so. The Shonokins, whatever they

really were and wanted, would not deal in warnings—not with him at least. Was the group of figures then an actual weapon, like the puppets which wizards pierce with pins to torture their victims? But Thunstone told himself that he had never felt better in his life. What remained? What reaction, for instance, was expected of him?

He mentally put another person in his place, a man of average mind, reaction and behavior. What would such a person do? Tear up the dummies, of course, with righteous indignation—starting with that simulation of the Shonokin with a conquering foot on its victim's neck. Thunstone allowed himself the luxury of a smile.

"Not me," he muttered.

Yet again he went to the desk, and returned the paper to the drawer. He opened another drawer. Catching hold of the Bible, he used it to thrust the little handkerchief-doll into the drawer, closed and locked it in. Then, and not until then, he approached the two full-sized figures. They were arranged on a rug. For all its crumpled-fabric composition, the simulated Shonokin seemed to stand there very solidly. John Thunstone knelt, gingerly took hold of the arm of his own image, and with the utmost deliberation and care eased it toward him, from under the foot of its oppressor. When he had dragged it clear of the rug, he took hold of the edge of the rug itself and drew it smoothly across the floor. The Shonokin shape rode upright upon it. He brought it to the door of the empty sitting room closet, opened the door, and painstakingly edged the thing, rug and all, inside.

This done, he closed and locked the door. From the bedroom he brought sticks of sealing wax, which he always kept in quantity for unorthodox uses. After some minutes, he had sealed every crack and aperture of the closet door, making it airtight. He marked the wax here and there with the Saint John's cross of his ring. Finally returning to his own likeness, he lifted it confidently and propped it upright in a chair, and sat down across from it. He winked at the rough mockery of his own face, which did not seem so blank and miserable now. Indeed, it might be said to wink back at him; or perhaps the fabric of the pillow-slip was folded across one of the smudgy eyes.

A little quiver ran through the room, as though a heavy truck had trundled by somewhere near. But no truck would be operating in the sealed closet.

Thunstone lighted his pipe again, gazing into the gray clouds of smoke he produced. What he may have seen there caused him to retain his smile. He sat as relaxed and motionless as a big, serene cat for minutes that threatened to become hours, until at last his telephone rang.

"Hello," he said into the instrument. "This is John Thunstone."

"You danger yourself," a voice told him, a voice accented in a fashion that he could not identify with any foreign language group in all his experience.

"And you are kind to warn me," replied Thunstone with the warmest air of cordiality. "Are you going to offer me advice, too?"

"My advice is to be wise and modest. Do not try to pen up a power greater than hurricanes."

"And my advice," returned Thunstone, "is not to underestimate the wit or determination of your adversary. Good day."

HE HUNG up the receiver, reached for the Bible, and turned from the Prophet Joel to the Gospel of Saint John. Its first chapter, specified by the old anti-diabolists as a direct indictment of evil magic's weakness, gave him comfort, though he was reading it for perhaps the four hundredth time. The telephone rang again, and again he lifted it.

"I deplore your bad judgment in challenging us," said the same voice that had spoken before. "You are given one more chance."

"That's a lie," said Thunstone. "You wouldn't give me a chance under any circumstances. I won't play into your hands." He paused. "Rather unusual hands you have, don't you? Those long third fingers—"

This time it was his caller who hung up suddenly. Musing, Thunstone selected from his shelf of books a leather-bound volume entitled *These Are Our Ancestors*. He leafed through it, found the place he wanted, and began to read:

Stone-age Europe was spacious, rich

and uncrowded, but it could acknowledge only one race of rulers.

Homo Nearderthalensis — the Neanderthal Man—must have grown up there from the dim beginning, was supreme and plentiful as the last glaciers receded. His bones have been found from Germany to Gibraltar, and his camps and flints and fire-ashes. We construct his living image, stooped and burly, with a great protruding muzzle and beetling brows. Perhaps he was excessively hairy—not a man as we know men, but not a brute, either. Fire was his, and the science of flint-chipping. He buried his dead, which shows he believed in an after-life, probable in a diety. He could think, perhaps he could speak. He could fight, too.

When our true forefathers, the first *Homo Sapiens,* invaded through the eastern mountain passes or out of the great valley now drowned by the Mediterranean, there was battle. Those invaders were in body and spirit like us, their children. They could not parley with the abhorrent foe they found. There could be no rules of warfare, no truces or treaties, no mercy to the vanquished. Such a conflict could die only when the last adversary died.

This dawn-triumph of our ancestors was the greatest, because the most fundamental, in the history of humanity. No champion of mankind ever bore a greater responsibility to the future than that first tall hunter who crossed, all aware, the borders of Neanderthal country.

THE book sagged in Thunstone's hands. His eyes seemed to pierce the mists of time. He saw, more plainly than in an ordinary dream, a landscape of meadow and knoll and thicket, with wooded heights on the horizon. Through the bright morning jogged a confident figure, half-clad in fur, with his long black hair bound in a snake-skin fillet, a stone axe at his girdle and a bone-tipped javelin in one big hand. If the frill of beard had been shaved from his jaw, he might have been taken for John Thunstone.

He was trailing something—the deer he had waylaid and speared earlier in the day. There it was up ahead, fallen and quiet and dead. The hunter's wise eyes narrowed. Something dark and shaggy crouched beyond it, seeming to drag or worry at the carcass. A bear? The javelin lifted in the big tanned fist, the bearded mouth shouted a challenge.

At that the shaggy thing rose on two legs to face him, and it was not a bear.

Thunstone's eloquent fancy had identified the hunter with himself. It was as if he personally faced that rival for the dead prey, at less than easy javelin-casting distance. It stood shorter than he but broader, its shoulders and chest and limbs thatched with hair. Its eyes met his without faltering, deep bright eyes that glared from a broad shallow face like the face of a shaggy lizard. Its ears pricked like a wolf's, it slowly raised immense hands, and the third fingers of those hands were longer than the other fingers.

Thunstone rose from his chair. The fancied landscape of long ago faded from his mind's eye, and he was back in his hotel sitting room. But the hairy thing with the strange hands was there, too, and it was moving slowly forward.

Thunstone's immediate thought was that he had expected something like this. The Neanderthal man, says H. G. Wells, was undoubtedly the origin of so many unchancey tales of ogres, trolls, mantacors and similar monsters. Small wonder that such a forbidding creature had impressed itself on the night memories of a race. . . . It was not coming toward him, but past him, toward the sealed door. Its strange-fingered hands pawed at the sealed cracks.

Thunstone's pipe was still in his hand. It had not gone out. He carried it to his mouth, drew strongly to make the fire glow, and walked across the carpet to the very side of the hairy thing. When he had come within inches, he blew a thick cloud of the herb-laden smoke into the ungainly face.

Even as it lurched around to glare, it was dissolving like one scene in a motion picture melting into another. It vanished as the smoke-cloud vanished. The telephone was ringing yet a third time.

Patiently he answered it.

"You are now aware," he was told by the same accented voice, "that even your own thoughts may turn to fight you."

"Any man may dismiss his own thoughts," replied Thunstone at once. "I have a special hell to which I send thoughts that annoy me. Can you afford to go on blundering? Why do you not call on me in person? My door is unlocked."

"So is mine," replied the other coldly. "On the floor below yours. Room 712. Come down if you dare."

"I dare, and do defy you for a villain," quoted Thunstone from Shakespeare, who also made a study of supernormal phenomena. Hanging up, he took from his smoking stand a glass ash tray. In this he painstakingly built a gratelike contrivance from paper clips, and upon the little grate kindled a fire of wooden match sticks. When it blazed up, he fed upon it some crumbs of his blended tobacco and herbs, and when these caught fire he poured on a full handful of the pungent mixture. It took the flame bravely. He carried it across the room, setting it in front of the sealed closet. The smoke curled up as from an incense burner, shrouding the entire wall from any magical intruder. Thunstone nodded approval to himself, went out, down one flight of stairs, and knocked on the door marked 712.

The door opened a crack, showing a slice of sallow brown face. A deep black eye peered at Thunstone, and then the door opened. A hand with a too-long third finger waved as if inviting him in. He crossed the threshold.

THE room was dim, with curtains drawn and a single crudely molded candle burning on a center table. Three Shonokins were there—one motionless under a quilt on the bed, one at the door, the third sunk in the armchair. They might have been triplets, all slender and sharp-faced, with abundant shocks of black hair. They all wore neat suits of gray, with white shirts and black ties, but to Thunstone it seemed that they were as strange to such clothing as if they had come from a far land or a far century. The door closed behind him.

"Well?" he said.

The Shonokin by the door and the Shonokin in the chair gazed at him with malignant eyes of purest, brightest black. Their hands stirred, rather nervously. Their fingernails appeared to be sharp, perhaps artificially cut to ugly points. The Shonokin on the bed neither moved nor stared. Toward him Thunstone made a gesture.

"I guessed more correctly about you than you about me," he said. "Your languid friend yonder—would it be tactless, perhaps to suggest that he lies there without any soul in him? Or that his soul is upstairs, animating a certain rude image which I have sealed carefully away?"

"We," said the seated Shonokin, "have never been prepared to admit the existence of souls."

"Tag it by whatever name you like," nodded Thunstone, "this specimen on the bed seems to be without it, and worse for being without it. Suppose we establish a point from which to go on with our discussion. You were able to fabricate, in my room, a sort of insulting tableau. I, for my part, was to enter, be surprised and angry, and attempt to tear it to pieces. Doing that, I would release upon myself—what?"

"You do not know," said the standing Shonokin tensely. It was his voice, Thunstone recognized, that had given the various telephone messages.

"Oh, it might have been any one of several things that hostile and angry spirits can accomplish," went on Thunstone with an air of carelessness. "I might have become sick, say; or have gone mindless; or the cloth, as I loosened it, might have smothered me strangely, and so on. Strange you went in for such elaborate and sinister attacks, when a knife in the back might have done as well. You intend to kill me, don't you?"

He looked at one of his interrogators, then the other, then once more at the figure on the bed. That Shonokin's face looked as pale as paper under its swarthiness. The lips seemed to quiver, as if trying feebly to gulp air.

"I think that it has been well established," Thunstone resumed, "that when a body sends forth the power that animates it, for good or for evil, it will die unless that power soon returns. But this doesn't touch on why you dared me to come down here. Did you dream that I wouldn't call your bluff. For it was a bluff, wasn't it?"

The eyes of the two conscious Shonokins were like octopus eyes, he decided. The

Shonokins themselves might be compared to the octopus people, whose natural home was deep in ocean caves, from which specimens ventured on rare occasions to the surface when man could see and divide his emotions between wonder and horror. . . .

"Thank you for giving us another thought to turn against you," said the Shonokin in the chair.

THE dark room swam, swam literally, for to Thunstone it was as though warm rippling waters had come from somewhere to close over his head. Through the semi-transparency writhed lean dark streamers, like a nest of serpents, their tips questing toward him. At the ends furthest from him they joined against a massive oval bladder, set with two eyes like ugly jewels. An octopus—and a big one. Its eight arms, lined with red-mouthed suckers, were reaching for Thunstone.

By instinct, he lifted his hands as though in defense. His right hand held his pipe, and its bowl emitted a twirl of smoke. Smoke under water!—But this was not water, it was only the sensation of water, conjured out of his chance thought by Shonokin magic. As the wriggling, twisting tentacles began to close around him, Thunstone put his pipe to his lips and blew out a cloud of smoke.

The room cleared. It was as it had been. Thunstone tapped ashes from his pipe, and filled and lighted it as before.

"You see," said the seated Shonokin, "that any fancy coming into your mind may blossom into nightmare. Is it a pleasant future to foresee, John Thunstone? You had better go up and open that sealed door."

Thunstone's great head shook, and he smiled under his mustache. "Just now," he said, "I am thinking of someone very like you, who died and was buried at the Conley farm. Why not make him appear out of my meditations?"

"Silence!" snarled the Shonokin who had opened the door. His hand lifted, as if to menace Thunstone with its sharp nails. "You do not know what you are talking about."

"But I do," Thunstone assured him gently. "Living Shonokins fear only dead Shonokins."

"Shonokins do not die," gulped the one in the dark.

"You have tried to convince yourselves of that by avoiding all corpses of your kind," Thunstone said, "yet now you are in dread of this dying companion of yours. His life is imprisoned upstairs. Without it he strangles and perishes. I learn more and more about your foolish Shonokin ways."

"You learn about us?" snapped the standing one. "We are ancient and great. We had power and wisdom when your fathers were still wild brutes. When you understand that—"

"Ancient?" broke in Thunstone. "Yes, you must be. Only an unthinkably old race could have such deep-seated folly and narrowness and weakness. Do you really think that you can swarm out again from wherever you have cowered for ages, to overthrow mankind? Human beings at least dare look at their own dead, and to move over those dead to win fights. You vain and blind Shonokins are like a flock of raiding crows, to be frightened away by hanging up a few carcasses of your own kind—"

"I have it!" cried the Shonokin who had stood by the door.

Weasel-swift and weasel-silent, he had leaped at Thunstone, snatched the pipe, and leaped away again. A wisp of the smoke rose to his pinched nostrils, and he dropped the pipe with a strange exclamation that might have been a Shonokin oath.

"Without that evil-smelling talisman," said the seated one, "I leave you to your latest fancy—raiding crows."

The room was swarming full of them, black and shining and clatter-voiced. A whir of many wings, a cawing chorus of gaping bills, churned around Thunstone, fanned the air of the room. Then, of a sudden, they were swarming—where?

"Now do you believe that your kind can die?" said Thunstone bleakly, his voice rising above the commotion. "The crows believe it. For they attack the dead, not the living."

THE crows, or the vision of them, indeed thronged over and upon the bed, settling into a black, struggling mass that hid the form that lay there.

"I thought on purpose of carrion-birds," said Thunstone. "Your power to turn thoughts into nightmares has rebounded."

He spoke to the backs of the two living Shonokins. They were running. He wondered later if they opened the door or, by some power of their own, drifted through it. He followed them as far as the hall, in time to see them plunging down the stairway.

Stepping back into the room, he retrieved his pipe and drew upon it. At the first puff of smoke the crows were gone, leaving him alone with the silent figure on the bed.

Now he made sure, touching the chill wrist and twitching up a flaccid eyelid, that the Shonokin was dead. He made a tour of the room, in which there seemed to be no luggage—only a strange scroll of some material like pale suede, covered with characters Thunstone could not identify, but he pocketed it for more leisurely study. Out into the hall he strolled, smoking thoughtfully. He was beginning to like that herb mixture, or perhaps he was merely grateful to it.

Back in his own quarters, he opened the sealed closet door without hesitation. On the floor lay a crumpled heap of sheets, garments and other odds and ends, as if something had worn them and had shaken them off. Thunstone carried them into his bedroom, then dismantled the image of himself. He telephoned for a chambermaid to make the bed and a tailor to press the suit.

At length he departed to find a favorite restaurant. He ordered a big dinner, and ate every crumb with an excellent appetite.

When he returned to the hotel late that evening, the manager told him of the sudden death, apparently from heart disease, of a foreign-seeming man in Room 712. The man had had friends, said the manager, but they could not be found. He was about to call the morgue.

"Don't," said Thunstone. "I met him. I'll arrange funeral details and burial."

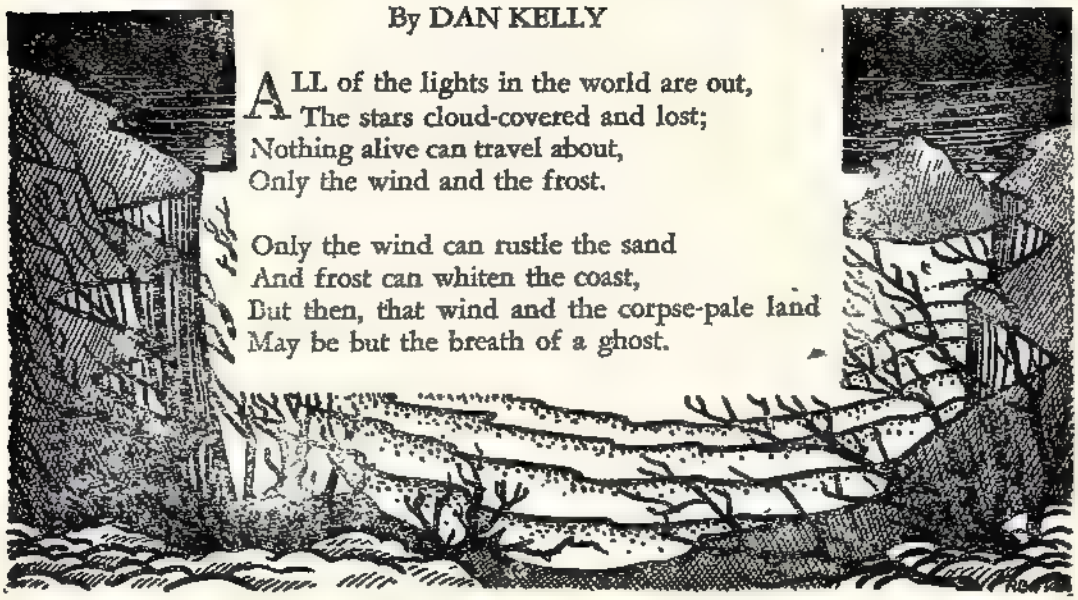
For a Shonokin corpse, buried in the little private cemetery on the farm he had inherited, would make that refuge safe from at least one type of intruder.

The manager, who knew better than to be surprised at Thunstone's impulses, only asked, "Will you notify his relatives?"

"None of his relatives will care to come to the funeral," Thunstone assured the manager, "or anywhere near his grave."

Wind Walks Not Alone

By DAN KELLY



ALL of the lights in the world are out,
The stars cloud-covered and lost;
Nothing alive can travel about,
Only the wind and the frost.

Only the wind can rustle the sand
And frost can whiten the coast,
But then, that wind and the corpse-pale land
May be but the breath of a ghost.

Please Go Way and Let Me Sleep

By ***HELEN W. KASSON***

IT WAS a room, just like any other room. It had walls and a floor and a ceiling —even a door. But no windows. In Spanish it was called *la tumba;* in French *le tombeau;* and in English—*the crypt.*

Anyway, the family was gathered—just as it would have been gathered in any other room—holding an indignation meeting. There was Great Grandfather for whom the tomb had been built. (He was the most indignant.) He had a long, patriarchal beard and was the first one dead and the head of the family. While he had undoubtedly had ancestors just like everybody else, no one cared about them. Gramps had founded the brewery off which his descendants lived —and nicely too!—so the family traced lineage back to him and stopped, completely satisfied. Gramps was sufficient.

Then there was Great Grandmother, *Gammer,* little and shriveled and rather the worse for lying almost a century in the damp. And Grandpa and Grandma whose bones were not quite so old; and Mother and Dad and Aunt Pansy who had never married and was quite withered even before she died; and little Willie who had died at the age of eight and was still something of a brat. Besides, there were a couple of poor relations, in the crypt of necessity and on

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

Can the living haunt the dead? After a manner of haunting?

sufferance and therefore not in a position to be as indignant as the *real* family. And there was one stranger—a sad and irretrievable error which, for twenty years, the Collins dead had been bemoaning.

The name on his niche read "Ned Collins" but he was *not* Uncle Ned. He had been Uncle Ned's seat-mate when the train had run off the embankment and his bones had been so mixed up with Uncle Ned's that the people who sorted them out had done a bad job. He was partly Uncle Ned: the right-hand little finger bone and the left shank which didn't, by any means, make him a genuine Collins. But he was mostly a stranger, and it hurt to know that he would lie through eternity in the sacred Collins crypt. Of course, it was not until a Collins died that he discovered the profane and sacrilegious truth. The living mourned at the grave of Uncle Ned and knew no difference.

BUT time, even in a crypt, knits bones together and Uncle Ned's proxy was made again of whole cloth, as it were. Often he complained of the stiff and arbitrary action of his right-hand little finger bone and his left shank and the Collins dead knew this was the *real* Uncle Ned's family pride extending even to his dismembered bones crying for his rightful place and resenting the presence of a stranger in the midst of the Collins clan.

But tonight it was not about the stranger in Uncle Ned's grave that the indignation meeting was being held. Strangely enough all anger was directed against the sole remaining living member of the family. His name was Ambie Collins and on earth he was known as a good and worshipful man.

And again, strangely enough, it was this very goodness and worshipfulness to which the dead in the family crypt objected.

"Why can't he leave us alone?" Gramps moaned. "Come every Sunday, rain or shine, there he is tramping on our heads, pounding around to dig a hole to set his vase of flowers steady. Crying and wailing up there like a banshee!"

"He means well," Mother said. (Comparatively new to Death she still had memory of the foibles of the living. Besides, she was Ambie Collins' mother and so retained a curious warmth of affection for him.) "It's the custom of the living to mourn its dead."

"Custom!" Gramps snorted. "You may well accept that custom. You're the last one dead and on the bottom tier. How can *you* hear him down there anyway? It's on *my* head he tramples. It's on *my* coffin-top he scratches around at an hour when decent people should be sleeping. I lived a long time and I've been a long time dead. I need my rest!"

Gammer nodded. "You're entitled to it, and so am I. I'm on the top tier too. He pounds on me as much as anyone." Two tears rolled down her leathery cheeks. "I'm awful tired, Pa."

Gramps inched his bones a little sideways and rattled his right hand for emphasis against the wall. "Entitled to it, I am," he croaked. "It was promised to me. All those days I went to church—fifty-two Sundays for eighty years. Well over four thousand days I spent listening to promises of the peace and rest I was going to get after I died. And what comes of it? My only living descendant maliciously spends one day a week trying to deprive me of my eternal sleep!"

"All right," Mother said, "he disturbs you. What are you going to—" The rest of the sentence was drowned under the sound of heavy banging. "Willie!" she screamed. "Stop pounding on that coffin. Do you want to break it?"

"Yippee! I'm a ghoul!" Willie shouted. "I'm robbing graves.* Look at me! I'm the head ghoul!"

"Well, stop it," Mother said, "or I'll sick a Vampire on you."**

GRAMPS disconsolately resumed the conversation. "I don't know what I'm going to do, but something's *got* to be done. That Ambie. He's—he's *haunting* us!"

"Why don't we haunt *him?*" Willie suggested with the fresh viewpoint of one just eight.

In unison the family, including the poor relatives who were in the crypt on sufferance and the usurper of Uncle Ned's final resting place, turned admiring eyes on Willie.

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*Author's note: Little boys learn an awful lot of funny stuff after they die.

**It doesn't hurt to frighten little boys after they're dead. You can give them all the psychoses you want. They're not going to grow up, anyway, thank goodness.

"That's it," they said, in as near unison as ten voices can make it.

"That's it," Gramps repeated as the founder, the head and the backbone of the family—and, incidentally, as the first and only Collins who had ever made a living for himself. "That's *exactly* it! He's been haunting us—now we haunt him. Show him how it feels to be pestered by someone from another world! Maybe upset his life a little."

"Not too much," Mother said quickly. "Don't upset his life too much."

"No, not too much." Gramps looked grim. "Only as much as he has upset our death. Perhaps we might make him feel the way it was when we were dying. Remember?

"When you choked and couldn't get another breath and your bones were pulled and pulled and pulled until the joints cracked. And that weight on your chest. Remember? When your ribs almost snapped and broke? And that s-q-u-e-e-z-i-n-g around your heart, that w-r-i-n-g-i-n-g, till you could almost feel it burst and break and the blood splash over whoever's fingers it was who was doing the s-q-u-e-e-z-i-n-g. And that icy trip with the Angel of Death, with his wings flapping and blowing frozen air over your body. And crossing the river in all that mud and slime, with obnoxious reptiles waiting to grab you if you slipped from the boat. No, we won't upset his life too much. Just a little. Just enough to make him know how it feels to die and how much you need rest after you've accomplished Death. Just enough to make him quit trampling on our heads and leaving those infernal flowers every Sunday morning. That's all."

Gramps grinned. It wasn't much of a grin, but you knew what he meant.

IT WAS Friday night and Ambie Collins didn't feel so hot. Charlotte had been nagging him again—and about the same old thing: Lulu. Now, don't get the idea there was anything *wrong* between Ambie and Lulu because there wasn't. They did have a thing in common: they were both *psychic*. But there was nothing more. Nothing more than a delicate spiritual affinity between them about which Charlotte had no right to be jealous. But this is the way it all came about.

Ambie Collins was known as a good and worshipful man—to the world. To his wife Charlotte he seemed faulty. He dropped his clothes where he stood at night, didn't bathe *quite* as often as nice people should, cracked his knuckles sometimes in a most annoying way and, worst, he resented terribly any questions which he believed infringed on his personal liberty.

Now, he wasn't a rounder. Don't think that! He spent his days in a conventional and circumspect manner clipping coupons on bonds bought with the money earned by Gramps' brewery (long since sold) and sitting in the stock exchange watching other people sweat as their investments swelled or withered. It was only for half an hour during the day that he did anything Charlotte might criticize, and that was when he left the broker's office and went to the corner drug store for an ice cream soda, just to keep his strength up, you know. And Charlotte *did* criticize that. With a vengeance!

For she had happened to pass the drug store one day just at four and seen Ambie half-heartedly sipping an ice cream soda, but whole heartedly devouring the luscious Lulu with his eyes. (It was near the beginning when Ambie and Lulu had just discovered their mutual preoccupation with spirits.) From then on nothing could ever make Charlotte believe Ambie needed that chocolate ice cream soda to stay the pangs of hunger. Truthfully, Ambie didn't. He needed Lulu to feed his soul, to stimulate his spirit, to speak with him of the realms of the Great Beyond. They both believed in Life Hereafter, they both *knew* they were psychic, they both lived in hope of some night meeting a benevolent ghost who would, in cosmic terms, explain a few things they were still hazy about. And they were, in the very near future, going to attend a seance together.

So Ambie's days were worth the living and he resented mightily having the gaunt Charlotte interfere with them. To tell the truth, he was a little afraid of her. In a way he loved Lulu—in a very high-minded, spiritual way—but he never considered asking Charlotte for a divorce. Besides, he really had no *good* reason to divorce her. It was only the intangibles that made them mis-

mated. The fact that he was psychic and she was not; that he had deeper, finer instincts and she was about as spiritual as a kitchen pot.

"If Charlotte were to die—" The thought slipped into Ambie's mind sometimes in the dead of night when, he was sure, even God was too tired to listen. Then he'd be free to pursue his out-worldly interests with Lulu and life would be worth living both by day *and* night. Who knows? Perhaps with free, untrammeled minds, he and Lulu *might* be able to raise a ghost.

THINGS were resting exactly at this point the Friday night Ambie came home tired and worn from a day of coupon clipping. He had had a chocolate soda *and* a frosted—Lulu had been unusually interesting that afternoon. So, though his mind was light and buoyant and his soul inspired, he had a heavy weight in his stomach and was in no mood for dinner. Charlotte saw that immediately from the way he picked at his food and, as usual, started picking at him. (It was maid's day out. She had cooked dinner herself and was terribly put out at the thought that Ambie might not do justice to it. And all because of that—that nothing! —that piece of fluff!—behind the drugstore soda fountain.)

"I suppose you had a chocolate soda this afternoon," she said acidly.

"I did."

"I suppose you were hungry."

"I was."

"So hungry that you drank the soda in complete silence and never raised your eyes from the glass."

Ambie raised his eyes now from the mess of food on his plate. "No," he said coolly, "I didn't drink it in silence. Why do you ask?"

Charlotte's cheekbones reddened. This was worse than she suspected. Ambie had never before admitted he had spoken to the luscious womanly bit behind the counter.

"I ask," she said hotly, "because I have always known there was something underhanded about you. I have always known you were a liar and an adulterer—and that you left the broker's office every afternoon for something besides an ice-cream soda."

Ambie threw down his napkin. "You are the liar," he said.

"You beast!" Charlotte's little black eyes flashed. "You monster! You betrayer of women! Don't think it will get you anywhere. I'll *never* divorce you. Never!"

Ambie had always suspected that. Probably that's why he had never asked. But now that she had brought up the subject he thought he had better plumb it further. "I'm a good man," he said. (Some slight acquaintance had told him that once. Someone who didn't know of the double life he was leading between Lulu and Charlotte, who knew only of his Sunday pilgrimages to the Collins' crypt.) "But if you think *that*, probably it would be better if we went separate ways." He cracked his thumb knuckle decisively.

Ignoring the knuckle-crack, Charlotte changed tactics. She knew she'd never get another man if she lost Ambie—not with her bony frame and close-set eyes. "Ambie!" She burst into tears. "How can you! How can you be so cool about breaking up our marriage, our life, our love?"

It was the word "love" that did it—turned Ambie from a mouse into a lion. The word was somehow an anacronism on Charlotte's thin lips.

"Love!" he sneered. "You don't know what the word means. You're just a mass of flesh and bones and—and a stomach! You haven't *anything*—not anything. You're no deeper than a—than a—sirloin steak!"

"And what has that—that other thing got? That piece of nothing at the drugstore —what has she got, I'd like to know?"

Ambie smiled, a secret smile. His voice was soft, nostalgic, when he spoke. "There are things," he murmured, "of which you have no conception. There are other worlds —worlds of the spirit, of the mind, of the soul. There is another life to which we shall all go, from which we have all come. The dead walk and speak with the living; the living sleep and speak with the dead."

Charlotte stared as wide-eyed as the close-set slits could make it. This side of Ambie she had never encountered before. She knew knuckle-cracking, non bathing, coupon clipping Ambie, but not the spirit, the *psychic* Ambie. Was he mad? Had his brain been harboring such thoughts all these years—

or had it, this moment, snapped because of her discovery of his perfidy with Lulu?

"There are ghosts," Ambie continued, unseen spirits who dwell constantly with the living. Who knows? Perhaps there is one here now—" He stopped abruptly, gasping and gagging. There was certainly nothing to keep him from speaking, but somehow he couldn't get words out though Charlotte could tell from his popping eyes that he was trying hard enough.

She poured a glass of water and thrust it at him. He got it to within half an inch of his lips but it stopped there. Something *seemed* to be in the way. But what?

"Drink it," Charlotte advised.

"Glub!" Ambie said.

"What's the matter with you?" Charlotte screamed.

"Tell her," Gramps said, and removed his hand from Ambie's lips.

For it was Gramps, arrived just in time to verify Ambie's statement about unseen spirits and just too late to catch the first part of the conversation about Lulu.

Ambie whirled. "Gramps!" he shouted. "Is it really you?"

"Is it really *who*?" Charlotte asked. (You see Ambie, being *psychic*, could see Gramps; but Charlotte, being nothing but a sirloin steak, couldn't.)

"It's Gramps, my great grandfather, come back from the Other World. Oh, wonderful! Wonderful! Wait till I tell Lulu." In his excitement, Ambie forgot that the Other Woman should never be mentioned before one's wife.

"There, there, Ambie," Charlotte said in a frightened voice. "Maybe you'd better sit down."

"Maybe I had," Ambie said weakly. He bent in the right places, but the chair was gone before the right place reached it. Gramps had whisked it away. Ambie landed, in the wrong place, on the floor with a dull thud.

Then again he seemed to strangle. With nothing visible before his lips, yet he desperately struggled to speak with no results. Nothing human sounding, anyway. "Kuh ih ow," he gargled, "Ah, Am." Which translated meant, "Cut out. Stop, Gramps!"

But Charlotte couldn't understand. She saw only a maniac, an epileptic, perhaps, writhing on the floor, kicking its legs and fighting against—absolutely nothing! (Being a sirloin steak is decidedly disadvantageous at times.)

FINALLY Ambie was on his feet and again in command of his tongue. He turned his back on Charlotte and faced Gramps. "Well!" he said. "Now that your little joke is over I'm certainly glad to see you. And looking so well, too."

(Gramps did look well, considering. Gammer had combed some of the grave mold out of his beard and his burial suit, having been made before the war—the Civil War, of course—when materials were really *good*, had lasted surprisingly well.)

"It's a wonder if I am," Gramps said sullenly. "I certainly don't get any rest."

"I suppose things are busy there—where you are."

"Busier'n they should be," Gramps said meaningly.

Charlotte was listening flabbergasted. Being unpsychic she could hear only Ambie's half of the conversation. "To . . . whom . . . are . . . you . . . speaking?" she asked peremptorily.

Ambie jumped as if he had been pinched. He had. Gramps chuckled maliciously.

"That ought to teach you," Gramps said.

"Teach me what?"

"How it feels to be haunted—to be deprived of rest."

For a moment Ambie thought Gramps was resentful of his and Lulu's interest in the Great Beyond, but on second thought he was sure that couldn't be it and decided to ignore the matter. "Look, Gramps," he said, "quit talking in riddles. How did you get here? Was it hard breaking through?"

"I'm *not* here," Gramps said. "It would take a Georgia chain gang to break through that layer of stone. Double locks on the door, too," he added petulantly. "You sure didn't take any chances I'd escape when you built that crypt."

"But you *are* here," Ambie said. "I see you."

Gramps looked annoyed. "I am not. I'm still *there*, lying in my coffin!"

"But Gramps—"

"Listen, Ambie. Did you ever read Freud on Hallucinations?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, there you have it!"

Ambie took a deep breath. "But you *couldn't* have read Freud. You died before he was translated."

"Didn't say I did," Gramps growled. "But *you* did. That's all that's necessary."

"You mean," Ambie said slowly, "that you're a hallucination, not a ghost?"

"Are they different?" Gramps asked disinterestedly. "I donno. You read the book. You ought to know."

Charlotte refused to be ignored longer. "Ambie," she screamed "Stop talking to yourself."

At that moment the doorbell rang. Charlotte was afraid to leave Ambie alone to answer it and Ambie was too busy staring incredulously at Charlotte to hear it, so Gramps went.

"Do you mean you can't see Gramps?" Ambie asked unbelievingly of his wife.

"Of course not. And neither can you!"

"Nor hear him?" Ambie persisted.

"I've heard nothing all evening but your insane mumblings."

"Wheee!" Ambie shrilled. "That means I really am psychic. Lulu always said so."

At a look from Charlotte he turned to find the minister, pale and shaken, leaning against the wall and mopping his forehead. "*Who* opened the front door?" the minister whispered.

"I did," Gramps said.

The minister being nothing but a sirloin steak with a spiritual calling hadn't been able to see Gramps at the door and wasn't able to hear him now. Ambie saw that he was waiting for an answer.

"I did," Ambie said.

"But—but—you were in *here.*"

"A form of magic," Ambie said airily. "My great grandfather taught me. The body is quicker than the eye and all that stuff, you know. Sit down, reverend.

THE reverend sat. On the floor, just the way Ambie had a few moments before. (Gramps, being an old guy, didn't know many new tricks. It is doubtful whether the hot foot had been in vogue during his lifetime. So to Gramps the whisking away of a chair just as a bottom descended was still the height of humor.)

Not only that, Gramps was thinking of all those Sundays he'd spent in church listening to promises of eternal rest, and Gramps was remembering just how early Ambie wakened him every Sunday morning. When he recognized the back-side-to collar of the reverend he decided to get even for at least one of those Sundays.

Charlotte helped the reverend to his feet while Ambie held the chair, firmly.

"That's enough, Gramps," Ambie said. "Play your jokes on me, if you must. Leave our guests—" He stopped and gagged. Gramps was taking him at his word.

Suddenly there was the sound of a loud slap.

"Ambie! Don't crack your knuckles," Charlotte said.

Ambie had put one hand to his cheek. When he removed it there were the marks of five bony fingers spreading out from his ear.

"Gramps," he pleaded, "stop. I don't know what I ever did to"— The sentence wasn't finished. Neither was Gramps. Ambie was struggling to speak again.

The reverend fastened his eyes on Ambie and drew back. "What is it, Mr. Collins? Are you ill?"

AMBIE decided not to attempt speech. He shook his head and walked toward the far side of the room. Midway his feet got entangled and he started doing something that looked like Shuffling Off to Buffalo, except that he wasn't shuffling off to any place. He was merely standing in one spot and tripping over nothing. The carpet was perfectly flat and unwrinkled, his shoelaces were tied, his socks were caught up tight with garters —to the naked eye there was absolutely nothing in the world to impede his progress. Still, his progress *was* impeded.

"Ouch," he yelled. "Take it away! What is *it*?"

"Barbed wire," Gramps chuckled. "The builders left it in the crypt. I always thought it might come in handy."

"Well, take it back there. And get back there yourself."

"I *am* there," Gramps said. "So's the barbed wire. Remember, Freud on Hallucinations—"

"Get out!" Ambie screamed.

"Really, Mr. Collins," the reverend said. "To whom are you speaking?"

Charlotte's eyes were getting more and more frightened, but the germ of a thought was growing behind them. "Ambie," she said gently, "there's no one here but us. Come. Sit down and talk to the reverend while I mix up some lemonade."

Ambie came. And sat. But he couldn't talk. Whenever he got ready to, Gramps slapped an invisible hand over his lips and Ambie *couldn't* talk. The reverend did the best he could with a one-sided conversation. He exhausted the weather and the parish house and finally got around to what he had come for—collecting money to build an addition to the church, from which money, incidentally, he expected to take a substantial squeeze. When he asked Ambie point-blank for a donation Gramps thoughtfully removed his hand from Ambie's mouth long enough to allow him to say, "Yes."

The reverend got out a pledge and Ambie signed it—for two hundred dollars. That meant about twenty for the reverend's private purse, which was about all he could expect from one parishioner, so he got up and left. He said he didn't believe he cared for any lemonade after all; it upset his digestion. Charlotte wasn't making it anyway. She was telephoning to her lawyer.

IT WAS Sunday morning in the crypt and everything was quiet. Until nine. Then there was the clatter of footsteps overhead and the sound of digging. A little later there was a heavy bump as the vase of flowers found its resting place. Then Ambie started pacing up and down and meditating aloud on the virtues of the departed.

"My mother," he said, "and my dad. And my dear grandfather and grandmother and Gramps—who made all that money. And Gammer—she always carried peppermint drops for me—and Uncle Ned who used to dandle me on his knee." He went down the roster—even including the poor relatives who were in the crypt of necessity and on sufferance and little Willie whom he had always loathed—until finally Gramps could stand it no longer.

"Get away from there, you idiot," he shouted. "Go away! Lemme sleep!"

But somehow, today, Ambie couldn't hear him. Maybe Ambie's hallucinatory powers were weaker, maybe Gramps' frail voice was not strong enough to penetrate the layer of earth and stone which separated them, to say nothing of the worlds between, or maybe Ambie's psychic deafness was due to the fact that though he mourned verbally and loudly his mind was completely centered on Lulu—and not in a spiritual way at all!

So, obvious of Gramps' irritation, Ambie continued his audible mourning. For this Sunday he was inordinately grateful to Gramps. You see, Charlotte had left his bed and board the Friday night of the haunting and already suit for divorce was in progress. Charlotte had weighed the facts and decided no man at all was better than a crazy man. Then too, Ambie's being crazy was sufficient explanation of why he preferred Lulu to her. So her pride was saved and she'd be able to live nicely on her alimony with no knuckle-cracking to distress her.

So Ambie was overcome with love and gratitude for Gramps who had made Charlotte want to divorce him. And he wailed. And Gramps shouted. And Gammer said she was getting an awful headache from all the noise and what did they mean when they said, "Quiet as the Dead?" Finally little Willie woke up and jumped out of his coffin and started to play Lampire Bat on Uncle Ned's proxy. Uncle Ned's proxy batted him away and cursed the day the people got his bones mixed with Uncle Ned's and laid him here. And Aunt Pansy, the spinster, wailed, "If I'd only married that man—even if he *wasn't* good enough for me—maybe I'd have been buried in *his* family crypt instead of here. Maybe I'd have gotten a *little* of that eternal rest I was promised."

The poor relatives didn't say anything because, after all, they were in the crypt on sufferance, but what they thought was enough to raise the whole clan of Collins dead.

But Ambie went on mourning—from nine to twelve—and then put on his black hat and got into his car and drove over to the drugstore.

He had a date with Lulu to go to a seance, but he thought they'd call it off and just park on the lake shore instead.

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

by Hall

ST. ELMO'S FIRE APPEARS AS A TIP OF LIGHT ON THE MASTS OF SHIPS. UNLIKE OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF ELECTRICAL FORCES IN NATURE, THIS FIRE DOES NOT CAUSE ANY INJURY TO MEN OR DAMAGE TO PROPERTY, *BUT IT IS CONSIDERED AN* **ILL OMEN** *BY SAILORS AND, THEREFORE, MUCH FEARED.*

IN THE BELIEF THAT THEY WERE MAKING ADEQUATE STORE FOR NEEDS IN THE OTHER WORLD, THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS FURNISHED THEIR TOMBS WITH MODELS AND PICTURES OF THINGS USED IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES. THEY EVEN INCLUDED MODELS OF **SERVANTS** *TO INSURE THEMSELVES OF MORE COMFORT IN THEIR NEW STATE OF BEING.*

Alannah

Sometimes love is good; sometimes it is possessive, destructive, wholly evil

I WAS never one to be hasty in my judgment of others, but I *do* think that Mrs. Stewart might have paid a little more attention to Maurice, she might have given him the kind of affection he needed. Now that everything is over, there can be no harm in setting down what I know about what happened at that house. Mr. Stewart could not have done any more than he did; he had his work, and sometimes he came out

By STEPHEN GRENDON

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

from the city pretty tired. Mrs. Stewart was the one. She was that kind of woman—lived for herself too much, and not enough for others. I don't say that a person shouldn't live for himself—but not alone that. My grandmother used to say that it is much better and richer to love than to be loved. I thought of that often about Mrs. Stewart; I always felt that she never knew what it was to love. Yet I wouldn't want to say that she didn't love her son; nobody knows what love is, and love is a great many things to different people. Sometimes love is the most enriching thing in the world, and sometimes it is not; sometimes it is good and wholesome, and sometimes it is possessive and destructive and evil. Sometimes it is strong enough to live after death, and if love lives after it, then surely hunger and terror and all the emotions of man, made strong enough and great enough, live afterward, too.

The Stewarts had taken the house in the Vermont hills when I joined them. That is, they had moved in for that summer, and they had been there for almost a month when I answered their advertisement for a governess. A great many women simply did not want to take positions so far from the city, which meant, really, that they wanted to be in the city, because the Stewart house was only about twelve miles from the nearest city, where Mr. Stewart had his law offices, and from which he came home almost every night to work over his briefs. Mrs. Stewart was not the type of woman I would have thought satisfied with such a place; she was one of those women who, because they think always of themselves, are apt to get very lonely if there is not someone before whom they can perform all their little vanities.

I know it sounds as if I were prejudiced against Mrs. Stewart, but I do not think I was. It's only that if she had been a different kind of person, I don't think anything would have happened—at least, things would not have happened as they did there. I ought to say that the very first time I saw the house, I had the feeling that there was something *wrong* about it. I know people will say, "Isn't that just like a woman!" but it is true, just the same. After I got to know Mrs. Stewart I just naturally thought that she was what was wrong about the house. That was a mistake, I know now. Sometimes I wonder if the house was not responsible for some of the things Mrs. Stewart did—or rather, didn't do. I really don't have any prejudice against her, poor woman; she is what she is, just as I am what I am, and Mr. Stewart, is what he is, and Maurice. . . .

THE house was really a beautiful house. It was old, a low two-story stone house, with a charming roof on which the moss grew green. The stone was yellow, but *wet*—actually wet outside; that I thought was due to the brook that flowed past outside, for there was a brook, a real Vermont brook, and if you've ever seen those crystal streams, with their green-blue water, you will know what I mean. The brook came flowing down from the hills, and right in the center of the grounds around the house, though a little off side, beyond the north end and so behind the house, its former owner had built a deep pool, with a fine brick and stone rim curving in an arc toward the brook from both banks; the brook flowed in one end and out the other. And there were trees all along the brook, so that the pool was always shadowed and dark, and one would have thought that there would be fish in plenty there, but, strangely enough, there were fish above the pool in the brook, lying under the grassy banks, and there were fish below, but there was not a fish or a frog or even a water spider in the pool, though lilies grew there, and their green leaves and yellow flowers made the water seem all the blacker, and there was a curious illusion of bottomlessness about it when you looked into the water.

They told me—that is, Mr. Stewart, who interviewed me—that Maurice was a "problem" child, and I came prepared to deal with something like a thoroughly spoiled youngster. Maurice was then five, or a little older, and he was a singularly beautiful child, with his grave blue eyes, which could sometimes be as merry as the blue water of the brook racing over the sunlit sand and the rocks in its course, and curly blond hair, and a sensitive, full-lipped mouth; his skin was fair, with a good color, and he had an innate understanding of neatness. All that first day I kept waiting for him to explode into mischief, but he did nothing of the sort; he was quiet, a little shy, he looked into books—he

was precocious for his age, they told me—and he behaved very well. I thought it would come the next day, but it did not, and finally, somewhat mystified, I went to Mrs. Stewart and asked her bluntly in what way Maurice was a "problem" child.

Mrs. Stewart was a dark-eyed, thin-faced woman. She seemed to be always a little remote from the present, but she was very clearly a most passionate type of woman, for she held her husband absolutely, and many times he deferred his better judgment to hers, though he never condoned error. She carried on a great deal of correspondence, and telephoned friends in the city all day long, and what I held and still hold against her was that she never seemed to find much time for Maurice, even if he was her son. When I asked her, she seemed to be annoyed at once, just as if she should not have had the duty of telling me.

"Oh, didn't Wayne tell you?"

"No, Madam, he did not. I expected a lively, mischievous lad, but I have not found Maurice at all mischievous."

"No, if it were only mischief!" she sighed. "But it is something much worse—I suppose the best way it is to tell you that he is endowed with an overabundance of imagination."

I said nothing.

"It is quite distressing for us, but he has fallen into the habit of telling the most barefaced lies, and Mr. Stewart and I feel that he must be broken of it. It is embarrassing for us all to hear him speak before those of our friends who week-end with us, and the worst of it all is that there is no explanation for it."

"What kind of lies, if I may ask?"

She waved one hand about half-vaguely, half in a gesture of dismissal. "Oh, all kinds of lies, Miss Kerlsen."

I must admit that I have never liked people who tell lies, though one expects a certain amount of it in children. It was a shock to me to hear that Maurice was addicted to lying; somehow, we are always prone to associate goodness and all the virtues with beauty, especially in children; and I resolved that I would do all in my power to break Maurice of prevaricating. The next day I even went so far as to test him. I saw him break a little dish in the kitchen, and carefully pick up the pieces to discard them in the ash-can; so I asked him quite casually about an hour later what had become of the little dish, as if I wanted to use it for something.

"I broke it, Miss Kerlsen," he said candidly.

THAT puzzled me. I reasoned that if he were the bare-faced liar his mother said he was, he would certainly have lied about the dish; he did not know I had seen him. It was very mystifying, and it grew more so as the days slipped by. Until the sixth day—that was Saturday, for I came on the Monday of that week. That day Maurice came over to where I was resting on the low veranda on the south side of the house and said that Alannah wanted to see me. Though I had never seen Maurice with a playmate, I assumed that Alannah was someone from one of the farms nearby.

"Bring her here," I said.

"Oh, no. You've got to go to her," answered Maurice, and held out his hand confidently.

"Very well," I said, laughing, and took his hand.

He led me around the house quite proudly. I thought his playmate would be out in back, that is, on the up-slope of the hill, but there was no one there. Nevertheless, Maurice led the way straight across the yard; I looked all around quickly, but I could see no one. Then we came to the pool, where Maurice was accustomed to spend long hours dreaming, and Maurice pulled at my hand, and sat down, indicating that I was to sit down, too.

"But where is she?" I asked.

"Do not say anything, please, Miss Kerlsen."

His fair face was flushed with excitement, and I thought his pulse had quickened a little. I put up my hand to touch his forehead, to discover whether he had a fever, but I had barely touched his skin before the most extraordinary thing happened. I felt as if my hand had been brushed aside. The impression was only momentary, it is true, and at the same time Maurice leaned away a little to look into the water; so that in a few seconds I decided that the illusion had been caused by the boy's movement. I looked around to where the woods came down at the far end of the lawn, half-expecting to

see a little girl come running out; but there was no sign of anyone. Maurice continued to gaze into the pool, with a little smile on his lips. His eyes, though, were somewhat anxious.

Suddenly, without a word, he stood up, offered me his hand, and hurried me back to the veranda. He smiled quickly at me, and then hastened back around the house. I was astonished by his action, and took the trouble to walk out from the veranda until I could look back into the lawn there to see where he had gone. Just as I suspected, he was sitting on the rim of the pool once more, looking into that dark water, reaching down with one hand.

That evening, as I stood beside his bed, I asked him, "And where was your Alannah this afternoon, Maurice?"

"You didn't see her," he answered in a curiously flat tone of voice, as if he were disappointed.

"No, I didn't," I answered. "How does she look?"

"Oh, she's pretty."

"Is she as pretty as Mother?"

"Yes."

"Where does she live?"

"In the pool."

SO AT last I understood what the Stewarts meant by saying that Maurice was a "problem" child, that he told bare-faced lies. It was not true that he told lies of all kinds; of that I was certain. He had probably told his parents about Alannah, and they had not understood that a sensitive, imaginative child lives in a world of make-believe, and, lacking companions in the flesh, is very apt to conjure up imaginary companions. At the moment I did not say anything; I only smiled at Maurice, but I was instantly resentful that his parents should not have taken a little more trouble to find out that what Maurice needed more than anything else was companionship. There was no one—only his mother, the cook, an old gardener who came over from a nearby farm, and myself, with his father in the evenings, all far older than the boy—no one his own age. And since there was no likelihood of there being anyone his own age here for the summer, I knew that I would have to enter into his play-world with him as much as possible.

I went right down to where Mr. and Mrs. Stewart sat, in a screened-off porch on the west side of the living room, and asked them whether the boy's imagination was the thing that had caused them to think of him as a problem child.

"It is lies," said Mrs. Stewart stubbornly.

"I would not call them lies," I answered, just as stubbornly. "The boy is just lonely, and he makes up these things."

Mr. Stewart looked up from his papers and observed that it was surely not a healthy sign. He seemed genuinely concerned.

"I don't know what you mean by healthy, but it's certainly normal enough."

"No, no it is not," said Mrs. Stewart.

"That is just not my opinion alone, Mrs. Stewart," I replied.

"I don't care whose opinion it is. Maurice has got to be stopped from telling those—those tall tales or whatever you want to call them." Her eyes flashed at me. "We are depending on you to do what you can."

"I shall do what I can, but I think it is the worst thing in the world to treat the boy as if he were a liar. I will not do that."

"We expect you to do things in your way, Miss Kerlsen," said Mr. Stewart.

The issue, you see, was not cleanly forced. It never was; Mrs. Stewart remained emotional about it, and annoyed; Mr. Stewart was too far from its daily manifestations, obviously. And I—well, I suppose you might say that if I had a more common-sense attitude, I lacked imagination in almost the same proportion as Maurice had an overabundance of it. I suppose if I had had a little more of it, what happened would not have had to happen.

As I was coming up the stairs considerably later that night, I saw Maurice coming down the hall. The hour was almost midnight, though it was a clear night, with a moon shining, and I wondered what he was doing up at that hour. He could have got himself a drink in the bathrooom next to his room; so it was not that. I concealed myself and watched him go by. He went down and out of the house, and I went after him, not making a sound.

HE WENT right over to the pool and crouched down on the rim in his white nightgown, and I heard his whispered voice calling, "Alannah! Alannah!" in hushed

tones. And then suddenly a little rippling came on the water, a vapor that was not there before. How it startled me! I felt chilled at the sight of it, but it was gone again just as quickly as it had come; there was nothing there, and I began to think my eyes had played a trick on me when Maurice came along with his hand held out and up, just as if he were holding someone's hand, the hand of an older person, and he kept looking up from time to time, as if he were listening to someone walking at his side.

I cannot describe my feelings as I saw that. It was uncanny. I saw him quite clearly in the moonlight, but there was absolutely nothing else moving across the lawn —only that curly-headed lad in his white nightgown. But when he went past me, where I stood in the shadow of an old tree near the house, I felt his passage as if a cold wind had brushed me, and once again that feeling of unutterable chill, and something of terrible emotional intensity rose up and seemed to cling to me, like something alive; so that I was frightened, almost terrified, by something I could not see or hear, something less tangible than the wind. That feeling lingered until after Maurice had gone into the house, and it was some moments before I could bring myself to follow him.

I WENT straight to the stairs—he had to go upstairs to his bed—and the moment I put my hand on the stair-rail, I withdrew it as if I had touched ice. I might as well have done so, for the rail was *wet*, wet and *cold*, oh, how cold! And the moment I touched it, I felt the most awful loneliness I ever knew, I felt the most dreadful solitude, as if I were isolated in a place far, far from any human touch or voice, and I felt invaded by the most tearing longing, the most moving desire for someone to hold close to me, someone to possess, *to love!*

It was awful!

I wrenched my hand away and fell back against the wall, shaking and trembling. I put on the light, and, though I would not touch the stair-rail again, I saw the wet gleaming on it all the way up, and I followed it; I saw the wet along the hall and the wall and I saw it on the knob of the door to Maurice's room. I did not want to touch it again, but I had to know that he was all right. So I leaned forward, bracing myself, and quickly opened the door.

The instant I touched the wetness, I felt it again—oh, the most heart-rending despair, the most pitiful agony, the most utter desolation! Oh, the terrible wanting for someone, someone near, someone to love and adore, someone to belong to and to belong to me! I clung to the door and looked in; but he was there, safe in his bed; and I pulled the door shut and drew away from it, shuddering and gasping, for such a tearing emotion I had never known, such a cold isolation of the spirit, such a dread and terror and *emptiness*. It was just as if all the sorrows and griefs of a lifetime had come to life anew and taken away all the memories of compensating pleasures, as if someone were forever doomed to live out his years far from his kind—oh, it is impossible to describe it, it was terrible!

Whatever they may say of me, I am not a coward. I knew then that there was something horribly wrong about the house. Despite the crying out of every instinct against it, I forced myself to go back downstairs, back out across the lawn to the pool. I sat down on the rim, and looked into that black water, where now the moonlight lay like silver, and I could see my face there looking up at me out of that dark, moonlit water, spectrally. It was beautiful there, with the moonlight all around, and the brook talking above and below the pool, and occasionally the sound of a fish splashing. I sat there looking into the pool for five minutes, ten minutes—I do not know what I expected to see there. Certainly it was not what I saw just as I got up to go—that other thin face, a woman's face, with dark where her eyes should have been, and light hair flowing wetly down beside her head, so sharp and strong that I thought it was someone looking over my shoulder into the water, and turned, but there was no one there, no one at all. And then there was nothing in the water either, nothing but my own face looking down. But there was something inside me again—once more that terrible loneliness, that poignant longing, that incredible, hurtful wanting, that agonized desolation which shook me and tore me and sent me staggering away from that pool and brought me to my knees in tears, that strong it was, that terrible and moving.

I fled to the house and was glad to be in my room, myself once more, save for the trembling and the pity I felt for whatever it was in such desperation out there.

I THINK it was two days later that I found the letter. It was stuck in an old album, put into where a photograph should have been, and left in a closet off my room. It was ten years old, in a man's handwriting, and it was addressed to Mrs. Luella Withers. It was not a nice letter.

Lu Alannah:

I have tried all week to talk myself into coming back and starting over, but it's no use. I'm too weak to do it, I never was much on the noble side of things anyway. So I've taken passage on a tramp steamer for Singapore and the Malay States, which makes it easy for you to get a divorce on grounds of desertion. I want you to have the house; it is really yours, you planned it and all. I am sorry there never was a youngster to share it with us for the little while we were there together. It was rotten luck, but it was our luck.

Jack.

I put it back where I found it and went down to talk to Mrs. Stewart. I asked her who had lived in this house before.

"A Mrs. Luella Withers, Miss Kerlsen."

"What kind of woman was she?"

She shrugged. "I have no idea. She's dead, of course. The house belongs to some relative and we leased it through an agent."

She knew nothing at all about Mrs. Withers. I was half of a mind to point out to her that it was a curious coincidence to discover that Mr. Withers had called his wife by the same pet name that Maurice called his friend. I should not have asked Mrs. Stewart at all; she said she thought it was not "proper" to inquire into the habits and the life of the previous tenant of the house. I should have talked to someone else right away. As it was, it was three days after that before I managed to take a few hours one afternoon while Maurice was asleep to walk down the country road and pay a visit to one of the neighbors.

Mrs. Warren was a farmer's wife, well along in years, but still a big, strong woman. She was canning strawberries that day, and I sat in the kitchen with her, after telling her who I was. Like most country people, once they have no reason to be suspicious of you, she was very friendly with an ease of manner that made it very pleasant to talk to her. She took me for just what I was, and only asked about the Stewarts in the most casual way, not prying at all, but just wanting to know something about her neighbors, so that it was easy for me, at last, to come around to the subject of Mrs. Luella Withers.

"Oh, yes, I knew her," said Mrs. Warren. "Poor, poor woman!" She shook her head, and an expression of sympathy appeared in her warm brown eyes.

"Was she unhappy here?"

"Unhappy's not in it. She was terrible lonesome. I never saw a woman—nor a man, either—that lonesome. She would set and eat her heart out. Her husband got lost on a steamer somewhere. Nobody knows what made him up and take the trip in the first place. They didn't have any children; so she was left alone. And how she wanted a child! I don't know what it was, but I think she was the one couldn't have children. Anyway, if a body took a boy or a girl up along with her visiting there, she never wanted the child to leave, she used to try to keep him there or coax him back—why, it was something awful the way she carried on! They said the lonesomeness just went to her head. It made her thin and hungry-looking, and I reckon in the end it would have killed her."

"She is dead, then?"

"Oh, yes. Couldn't stand it any more. I guess he left her the house, but there wasn't much money; she tried to sell it, but she couldn't; and she couldn't go anywhere else—no money, you see—so one fine day she up and drowned herself."

"In the pool," I said almost involuntarily.

"Yes. They say it's deeper than a body thinks."

It gave me a queer helpless feeling to listen to Mrs. Warren tell about Mrs. Withers. "Tell me," I said at last, "did you ever hear her called *Alannah?*"

"That was *his* name for her. I reckon it's a sweetening name. It's not a name that's in the books, but he would say it the way a man would talk to his sweetheart, and

she would smile and her eyes would shine—so I reckon that's what it was."

AFTER that, I felt that the best thing for Maurice would be to get him away from there. I thought it all over that night, and the next morning, before Mrs. Stewart left, I went downstairs and talked to them both at the breakfast table. Maurice was still asleep. I said that I had been thinking everything over, and I felt that Maurice was not lying at all, that his loneliness was responsible for his queer fancies. Perhaps I should have said that I was not sure they were fancies, but I knew that if I had, they would have discounted everything I recommended; so I could not; I had to hold back part of the truth. They were somewhat put out, but I convinced them.

Then I said, "If I may make a further suggestion, I would most strongly recommend that Maurice be not told of your intention to leave until it is time to go, or else he may brood about it."

"That is going too far," said Mrs. Stewart. "I will not have the boy growing up a mollycoddle. He will have to learn now that life never gives anybody his way all the time."

I said that the principle was a sound one, but in this case, I felt its application would work adversely, and I begged them to reconsider, with such earnestness that Mr. Stewart said finally they would think it over, and there the matter rested—until the day before they left.

Mrs. Stewart had her way after all. True, they compromised. Mr. Stewart thought I was right, but Mrs. Stewart thought she was right; so they compromised by not telling Maurice until the morning of the day before they planned to return to town, and then they told him.

We were all sitting at the table that morning, and when they told him, I saw his face; he went all white, and one hand clenched tightly around his fork.

"I'm not going," he said in a low voice.

"What was that?" asked Mrs. Stewart.

"I'm not going," he said again.

"I don't think you need more than a day to say goodbye to your *friend*," said Mrs. Stewart coldly.

Mr. Stewart coughed.

Maurice put down his fork precisely and sat back.

"Eat your breakfast, Maurice," said Mrs. Stewart warningly.

"I'm not hungry."

"Eat."

"I won't.

Mrs. Stewart looked up with flashing eyes. "You see, first it is lies and then it is disobedience," she said to no one in particular. "It goes from bad to worse, and if he is this way now, what will he be in a few years from now?"

Maurice got up and went away from the table.

"Come back here!" cried Mrs. Stewart in a voice that was shrill with anger.

Maurice never said a word but simply walked out of the room.

Mrs. Stewart would have got up and gone after him, but he held her back. He said brusquely that telling Maurice had been a shock, and it was better to let it work itself out of him without any unnecessary pressure. I was grateful for that, and Mrs. Stewart, after brooding about Maurice's behavior for a few minutes, resumed her breakfast and grew quite cheerful again, as if she had forgotten the entire incident.

But I did not forget it. I watched Maurice carefully all that day, and I watched him especially at the pool. I was short with his lessons that day because I knew he would want to go around and bid his favorite haunts goodbye. He did not say very much, but I could see that he had something on his mind. People often think, particularly adults who have grown far away from their own childhood, that a child's world is dependent upon the world of the adults; but this was never so and will never be true, for a child always lives in his own world, no matter what his circumstances, and a sensitive child never completely forgets that world in his adulthood.

I WAS glad when Maurice fell asleep that night. He had spent a long time at the pool during the late afternoon, and I felt sure that he had been bidding Alannah goodbye; so I asked him gently that evening whether he had.

"Yes. She doesn't want me to go, and I don't want to go. Miss Kerlsen, I like her better than Mum. Is that wrong?"

"I don't think so if you keep it your secret." It was a difficult question to answer.

"Alannah loves me."

"Yes," I said, with a catch in my throat. "Yes, I'm sure she does. But you can come back some time and see her again."

He looked at me gravely and smiled. "They always tell me I'm lying when I talk about Alannah, but you don't, Miss Kerlsen."

"I believe you, Maurice," I said.

"Thank you," he answered.

I DID not leave him until he had fallen asleep. And then I sat up until one o'clock in the morning.

As it turned out, I did not sit up long enough. I was very tired, for I had helped with the packing, and I fell asleep. It was about two o'clock when I awoke, and the waning moon had just reached about tree-height in the sky. I do not know what woke me, unless it was the movement of something before my eyes, closed as they were; that is an experience far more usual than is commonly supposed. I had fallen asleep before the window that looked down to the lawn and the brook; the pool lay within easy sight, and the object which had crossed before my eyes was Maurice in his nightgown on his way to the pool.

I was fully awake on the instant. I came out of my chair to my knees at the window and called to him.

"Maurice! Maurice! Come back!"

But he did not turn. He went straight over to the pool and he sat down on the rim of it, and I heard his voice, low and soothing, as if he were comforting someone, and then I saw that vapor again, like a long, white woman's arm come up out of the water and take his hand and pull him into the pool.

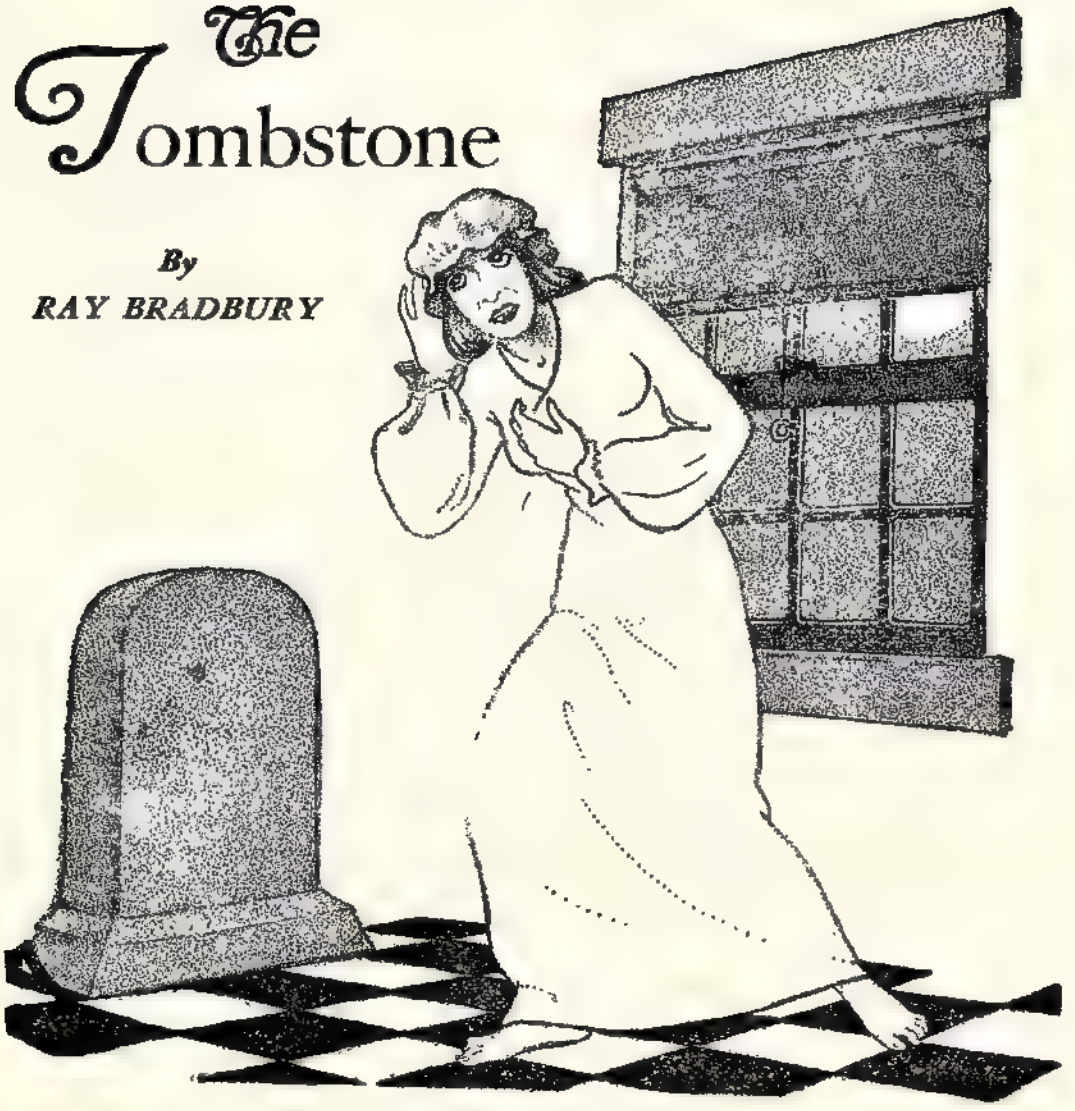
I screamed, stumbled to my feet, and ran out of the room as fast as I could—down the stairs and across the lawn.

But I was too late. Maurice had gone under and he did not come up again until he had drowned.

Even while the others came running from the house, there was something else. While I knelt there at that dark pool I felt something come out of it and go past me toward the stone house behind, and I saw the grass move in the moonlight as if two people walked there. And what I felt was not cold, it was not any more that terrible, despairing loneliness—no, it was warm and fulfilling, ineffably beautiful, as if the heart and soul of love itself had become briefly, briefly tangible there and touched me in passing by.

The Tombstone

By
RAY BRADBURY



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

WELL, first of all there was the long trip, and the dust poking up inside her thin nostrils, and Walter, her Oklahoma husband, swaying his lean carcass in their model-T Ford, so sure of himself it made her want to spit; then they got into this big brick town that was strange as old sin, and hunted up a landlord. The landlord took them to a small room and unlocked the door.

There in the middle of the simple room sat the tombstone.

Leota's eyes got a wise look, and immediately she pretended to gasp, and thoughts skipped through her head in devilish quickness. Her superstitions were something Walter had never been able to touch or take away from her. She gasped, drew back, and Walter stared at her with his droopy eyelids hanging over his shiny gray eyes.

"No, no," cried Leota, definitely. "I'm not moving in any room with any dead man!"

"Leota!" said her husband.

"What do you mean?" wondered the landlord. "Madam, you don't—"

There's some mighty peculiar things under a tombstone; some are dead, and some....

Leota smiled inwardly. Of course, she didn't really believe, but this was her only weapon against her Oklahoma man, so—"I mean that I won't sleep in no room with no corpse. Take him out of here!"

Walter gazed at the sagging bed wearily, and this gave Leota pleasure, to be able to frustrate him. Yes, indeed, superstitions were handy things. She heard the landlord saying, "This tombstone is the very finest gray marble. It belongs to Mr. Whetmore."

"The name carved on the stone is WHITE," observed Leota coldly.

"Certainly, that's the man's name for whom the stone was carved."

"And is he dead?" asked Leota, waiting.

The landlord nodded.

"There, you *see!*" cried Leota. Walter groaned; a groan which meant he was not stirring another inch, looking for a room. "It smells like a cemetery in here," said Leota, watching Walter's eyes get hot and flinty. The landlord explained:

"Mr. Whetmore, the former tenant of this room was an apprentice marble-cutter, this was his first job, he used to tap on it with a chisel every night from seven until ten."

"Well—" Leota glanced swiftly around to find Mr. Whetmore. "Where is he? Did he die, too?" She enjoyed this game.

"No, he discouraged himself and quit cutting this stone to work in a defense plant."

"Why?"

"Made a mistake." The landlord tapped the marble lettering. "WHITE's the name here. Spelled wrong. Should be WHYTE, with a Y instead of an I. Poor Mr. Whetmore. Inferiority complex. Gave up at the least little mistake and scuttled off."

"I'll be damned," said Walter, shuffling into the room and unpacking the rusty brown suitcases, his back to Leota. The landlord liked to tell the rest of the story:

"Yes, Mr. Whetmore gave up easily. To show you how touchy he was, he'd percolate coffee mornings, and if he spilled a teaspoonful it was a catastrophe—he'd throw it all away and not drink coffee for days! Think of that! He got very sad when he made errors. If he put his left shoe on first, instead of his right, he'd cease trying and walk barefooted for ten or twelve hours, on cold mornings, even. Or if someone spelled his name wrong on his letters, he'd replace them in the mail-box marked NO SUCH PERSON LIVING HERE. Oh, he was a great one, was Mr. Whetmore!"

"That don't paddle us no further upcrick," pursued Leota grimly. "Walter, what're you commencing?"

"Hanging your silk dress in this closet; the red one."

"Stop hanging, we're not staying."

The landlord blew out his breath, not understanding how a woman could grow so dumb. "I'll explain once more. Mr. Whetmore did his home work here; he hired a truck which carried this tombstone here one day while I was out shopping for a turkey at the grocery, and when I walked back—tap-tap-tap—I heard it all the way downstairs—Mr. Whetmore had started chipping the marble. And he was so proud I didn't dare complain. But he was so awful proud he made a spelling mistake and now he ran off without a word, his rent is paid all the way till Tuesday, but he didn't want a refund, and now I've got some truckers with a hoist who'll come up first thing in the morning. You won't mind sleeping here one night with it, now will you? Of course not."

The husband nodded. "You understand, Leota? "Ain't no dead man under that rug." He sounded so superior, she wanted to kick him.

She didn't believe him, and she stiffened. She poked a finger at the landlord. "He wants his money, and you, Walter you want a bed to drop your bones on. Both of you are lying from the word 'go'!"

The Oklahoma man paid the landlord his money tiredly, with Leota chastizing him, the landlord ignored her as if she were invisible, said good-night and she cried "Liar!" after him as he shut the door and left them alone. Her husband undressed and got in bed and said, "Don't stand there staring at the tombstone, turn out the lights. We been traveling four days and I'm bushed."

Her tight criss-crossed arms began to quiver over her thin breasts, "None of the three of us will get any sleep," she said.

Twenty minutes later, disturbed by various sounds and movements, the Oklahoma

man unveiled his vulture's face from the bedsheets, blinking stupidly. "Leota, you still up! I said, a long time ago, for you to switch off the light and come sleep! What you doing there?"

It was quite evident what she was about. Crawling on rough hands and knees, she placed a jar of fresh-cut red, white and pink geraniums beside the headstone, and another tin-can of new-cut roses at the foot of the imagined grave. A pair of shears lay on the linoleum, dewy with having snipped flowers in the night outside a moment before.

Now she briskly whisked the colorful linoleum with a midget whisk broom, praying so her husband couldn't hear the words but just the murmur. When she rose up, she stepped across the grave carefully so as not to defile the buried one, and in crossing the room she skirted far around the spot, saying, "There, that's done," as she darkened the room and laid herself out on the whining spring which sang in tune with her husband who now asked, "What in the Lord's name!" and she replied, looking at the dark around her, "No man's going to rest easy with strangers sleeping right atop him. I made amends with him, flowered his bed so he won't stand around rubbing his bones together late tonight."

Her husband looked at the place she occupied in the dark, and couldn't think of anything good enough to say, so he just swore, groaned, and sank down into sleeping.

Not half an hour later, she grabbed his elbow and turned him so she could whisper swiftly, fearfully into one of his ears, like a person calling into a cave: "Walter!" she cried. "Wake up, wake up!" She intended doing this all night, if need be, to spoil his superior kind of slumber.

He struggled with her. "What's wrong?"

"Mr. White! Mr. White! He's beginning to haunt us!"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"I'm not fibbing! Listen to him!"

The Oklahoma man listened. From under the linoleum, sounding about six feet or so down, muffled, came a man's sorrowful talking. Not a word came through clearly, just a sort of sad mourning.

The Oklahoma man sat up in bed. Feeling his movement, Leota hissed, "You heard, you heard?" excitedly. The Oklahoma man put his feet on the cold linoleum. The voice below changed into a falsetto. Leota began to sob. "Shut up, so I can hear," demanded her husband, angrily. Then, in the heart-beating quiet, he bent his ear to the floor and Leota said, "Don't tip over the flowers!" and he cried, "Shut up!" and again listened, tensed. Then he spat out an oath and rolled back under the covers, "It's only the man downstairs," he muttered.

"That's what I mean. Mr. White!"

"No, not Mr. White. We're on the second floor of an apartment house, and we got neighbors down under. Listen." The falsetto downstairs talked. "That's the man's wife. She's probably telling him not to look at another man's wife! Both of them probably drunk."

"You're lying!" insisted Leota. "Acting brave when you're really trembling fit to shake the bed down. It's a haunt, I tell you, and he's talking in voices, like Grandma Hanlon used to do, rising up in her church pew and making queer tongues all mixed, like a black man, an Irishman, two women and three frogs caught in her craw! That dead man, Mr. White, hates us for moving in with him tonight, I tell you! Listen!"

As if to back her up, the voices downstairs talked louder. The Oklahoma man lay on his elbows, shaking his head hopelessly, wanting to laugh, but too tired.

Something crashed.

"He's stirring in his coffin!" shrieked Leota. "He's mad! We got to move outa here, Walter, or we'll be found dead tomorrow!"

More crashes, more bangs, more voices. Then silence. Followed by a movement of feet in the air over their heads.

Leota whimpered. "He's free of his tomb! Forced his way out and he's tromping the air over our heads!"

By this time, the Oklahoma man had his clothing on beside the bed, and was putting on his boots. "This building's three stories high," he said, tucking in his shirt. "We got neighbors overhead who just come home." To Leota's weeping he had this to say, "Come on. I'm taking you upstairs to meet them people. That'll prove who they are. Then we'll walk downstairs to the first

floor and talk to that drunkard and his wife. Get up, Leota."

Someone knocked on the door.

Leota squealed and rolled over and over making a quilted mummy of herself. "He's in his coffin again, rapping to get out!"

The Oklahoma man switched on the lights and unlocked the door. A very jubilant little man in a dark suit, with wild blue eyes, wrinkles, gray hair and thick glasses danced in.

"Sorry, sorry," declared the little man. "I'm Mr. Whetmore. I went away. Now I'm back. I've had the most astonishing stroke of luck. Yes, I have. Is my tombstone still here?" He looked at the stone a moment before he saw it. "Ah, yes, yes, it is! Oh, hello." He saw Leota peering from many layers of blanket. "I've some men with a roller-truck, and, if you don't mind, we'll move the tombstone out of here, this very moment. It'll only take a moment."

The husband laughed with gratitude. "Glad to get rid of the damned thing. Wheel her out!"

Mr. Whetmore directed two brawny workmen into the room. He was almost breathless with anticipation. "The most amazing thing. This morning I was lost, beaten, dejected—but a miracle happened." The tombstone was loaded onto a small coaster truck. "Just an hour ago, I heard, by chance, of a Mr. White who was dying of pneumonia. A Mr. White, mind you, who spells his name with an 'I' instead of a 'Y'. I have just contacted his wife, and she is delighted that the stone is all prepared. And Mr. White not cold more than sixty minutes, and spelling his name with an 'I', just think of it. Oh, I'm so happy!"

The tombstone, on its truck, rolled from the room, while Mr. Whetmore and the Oklahoma man laughed, shook hands, and Leota watched with suspicion as the commotion came to an end. "Well, that's now all over," grinned her husband as he closed the door on Mr. Whetmore and began throwing the canned flowers into the sink and dropping the tin cans into a waste-basket. In the dark, he climbed into bed again, oblivious to her deep and solemn silence. She said not a word for a long while, but just lay there, alone-feeling. She felt him adjust the blankets with a sigh, "Now we can sleep. The damn old thing's took away. It's only ten-thirty. Plenty of time left for sleep." How he enjoyed spoiling her fun.

Leota was about to speak when a rapping came from down below again. "There! There!" she cried, triumphantly, holding her husband. "There it is again, the noises, like I said! Hear them!"

Her husband knotted his fists and clenched his teeth. "How many times must I explain. Do I have to kick you in the head to make you understand, woman! Let me alone. There's nothing—"

"Listen, listen, oh, listen," she begged in a whisper.

They listened to the square darkness.

A rapping on a door came from downstairs.

A door opened. Muffled and distant and faint, a woman's voice said, sadly, "Oh, it's you, Mr. Whetmore."

And deep down in the darkness underneath the suddenly shivering bed of Leota and her Oklahoma husband, Mr. Whetmore's voice replied: "Good evening again, Mrs. White. Here. I brought the stone."

Second Childhood

By JACK SNOW

"HE HAS come back, John," Miss Lucy stated simply with a faint smile. "All the way back over all those years—what a bridge of memory he has crossed!"

The old lady sighed, her voice sounding thinly in the dying garden like the memory itself of a voice, just as the ruined blossoms and splotched leaves were silent mementoes of a once lovely garden.

"Is that what you wished to tell me, Miss Lucy?" I asked. The fragile body, withered as a leaf, leaned to me for support as we walked slowly down the garden path. "Merely that memories of your childhood are growing stronger? That is not uncom-

We never really forget childhood playmates, nor they us. . . .

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

mon, you know, with people of your age. As you approach the end of your long journey," I added, "memory becomes brilliantly clear and vivid and you recall many childhood scenes that have lain buried for long years in the depths of memory."

"Yes, yes, I know," answered Miss Lucy. "But this is something more—something more, John, then just memory. Willie has come back. He is just as he was when I was a little girl and we played in this very garden through the long summer days. I see him, John; I talk with him."

"Just who is this Willie?" I asked patiently, knowing that it was far better for Miss Lucy to discuss these fancies with me, her doctor and friend of long standing, than to close them away morbidly in her aging mind.

"Willie was my childhood playmate—my only playmate. I was a very lonely child and lived a solitary life here in this huge old house. There were only Father, my governess and the servants for companions, and they were poor enough companions for an imaginative child." Miss Lucy paused, fumbling among her memories. "Of my mother I recall nothing. I know her only as she appears in the painting which hangs in the library: a forceful featured, stern-faced woman. Strange," Miss Lucy went on musingly, "that with all her strength she yielded so easily to death and died so young."

I could not help adding silently in my own thoughts, "And equally strange that this fragile wisp of humanity beside me should endure and persevere against death for so long a time."

"Was Willie the son of one of the servants?" I prompted.

Miss Lucy glanced at me in surprise.

"No, no!" she exclaimed with a bird-like little chirp. "I do not know really who he was. I know only that my earliest memories are of Willie. He was always with me. It is as though he had been born or had entered this world at the same time I did—accompanied me. Father and the others were at first amused when I told them about Willie. I was scarcely able to talk then. But as I grew older their amusement changed to impatience and then anger. They said I must stop all my foolishness about Willie. They never understood."

"You mean they never saw Willie?" I asked.

"Oh, no! He was much too clever to allow them to see him. He revealed himself only to me."

I sighed and faced the old lady. "Miss Lucy," I began, "do you mean to tell me that this Willie of yours was nothing more than one of those dream children that lonely boys and girls sometimes invent when they are deprived of human playmates?"

MISS LUCY'S faded old eyes opened wide with indignation as she replied stubbornly, "Now you are talking just like the others. I tell you Willie was very real—as real as I am. And," she concluded with triumph, "he has kept his word. He has done as he said he would—he has come back!"

"He told you he would come back?" I asked curiously.

"Threatened, rather," the old lady replied, staring into the shadows. "I can remember the scene as clearly as though it were only yesterday instead of seventy years ago. I was seventeen at the time. I had just met David and fallen in love with him. It seemed that within the space of an hour I had grown up, had stopped being a child and had become a woman.

"It was right here in this garden in the twilight of a far-away June night that I sent Willie away forever—or so I thought. I was to go to a ball with David that evening, and I was eager to begin dressing, so perhaps I was a little hasty and rude with Willie. I told him he must go away, that I was no longer a child. Oh, he was furious! He accused me of forsaking him for David. And really he was almost pathetic—so small and so angry as he turned from me and ran down the garden shouting to me that he would go, but that he would come back. There were actually tears in his black eyes—tears of rage," she added absently.

"Then Willie did not grow as you did; he remained a small child?"

"No," Miss Lucy replied, "Willie never changed. He was then and he is now just as I first remember him—a boy about seven years of age. He is dressed in the children's fashions of seventy years ago. Why," the old lady went on, the flicker of a smile

haunting her face, "he still carries that ugly stone hatchet that he loves so well. He calls it his tomahawk. It is the only toy he ever had. He used to play Indian with it here in this garden when I was a child. Poor little Willie, it was so long ago. At least *he* has been faithful. The years meant nothing to him." The old lady's voice drifted vacantly and forlornly into the thickening shadows of the garden.

For a brief time we were both silent, lost in meditation. Then, feeling the chill and dampness of the garden as evening drew on, I escorted Miss Lucy to the house where I left a mild sleeping potion for her and cautioned Hannah, Miss Lucy's housekeeper and companion, not to leave her charge too much alone—melancholia and hallucinations grow out of solitude and loneliness. With that I departed for my home where I was long overdue for dinner.

AS I walked the short distance to my own comfortable house, I reflected on Miss Lucy's unhappy life. As family physician and friend, I had known Miss Lucy as long as I had known anyone. Always everyone had referred to her as "Miss Lucy" and as "Miss Lucy" I, first as a child and then as a man, had known her. My earliest memories of her were of a beautiful but sad-faced woman in her early thirties. The death of her sweetheart in a tragic hunting accident a few days before the day set for their wedding had blighted her entire life. She had shut herself up in the gloomy house and lived out her days as a lonely recluse. And now this was the end. She was turning back to her childhood, seeking the companionship of that first friend—an imaginary child playmate.

"Truly," I ruminated, as I walked swiftly through the damp of that darkening October evening to the beckoning cheer of a hearty dinner and a warm fireside, "this was a splendid example of the evolution of the life span, moving from childhood to adulthood and back to childhood again — the completed circle." As I stepped over my threshold, and was greeted with the aroma of dinner waiting to be served, I forgot for the time all about Miss Lucy wandering in her dead garden with her pathetic imaginings.

FROM that time on I made it a point to look in on Miss Lucy at least once a week. Not that she needed medical care. But I knew that I was her only visitor, and someone from outside her own small world was necessary to keep her from sinking too deeply into her dreams. To all outward appearances my aged patient remained unchanged. And yet, I found myself disturbed by something in her manner—a furtive restlessness, an unexpressed apprehension that lurked in her tired old eyes.

At last one day I asked Miss Lucy the question, the answer to which, I felt sure, would explain the old lady's uneasiness. "Have you seen Willie lately?"

Miss Lucy started, then folding her thin hands, she regarded me quietly from pale gray eyes set in a lace filigree of tiny wrinkles.

"Yes, John," she murmured, "I see him quite often now. He comes to me almost every day. And, John, he—he is so very angry with me!"

"Angry?" I asked. "Why should you imagine he is angry with you?"

"Because I will not go away with him," Miss Lucy stated simply. "Willie says that he can make me a little girl again and that we shall be able to play in the shadows in the garden just as we used to so many long years ago—if—if I will go away with him."

"But this is nonsense, Miss Lucy," I said firmly. "You are letting your imagination run away with you."

"You do not know Willie," replied Miss Lucy stubbornly. "He wants a playmate. I have kept him alone for a long time—all those years when I sent him away from me. He will not stay alone any longer."

"But you really don't believe," I began, and then broke off with a smile. "Come, Miss Lucy," I said, adopting the condescending tone one uses with unreasonable children, "this imaginary child of yours is claiming altogether too much of your attention. You must think of other things."

Miss Lucy stared at me with empty eyes like a ghost.

"Imaginary? Other things? There are no other things in my life," she said hopelessly. "Willie is the only reality left."

And then she went on as though I hadn't spoken. "You don't know Willie," she re-

peated persistently. "Willie is not like other children. He is not *good*. There is something strange about him — something I never could quite understand, although he has tried to whisper to me about himself, and then his manner and tone frightened me so that I would not listen. The first time he tried to tell me I was only a little girl and could not have understood. Nevertheless something of the evil of his words I must have sensed, for I clapped my hands to my ears and burst into tears. No, Willie is not like other children. I believe him. I believe he can do what he says. He can take me away with him and make me like himself if he wants to—only, I am afraid." Miss Lucy's voice had subsided to a whisper as she finished this strange speech.

I realized the uselessness of arguing with the old lady in her present state of mind. I recognized symptoms of cumulative hallucination indicating extreme ageing, and—I believed—dissolution of her mind. I concluded this visit by instructing Hannah to keep a close watch on her mistress.

The occasion of my last visit to Miss Lucy found me making my way hastily to the old Victorian mansion in answer to a phone call from Hannah, saying that Miss Lucy had not risen that morning as was her custom, but had remained in bed all day. I had been absent from my office making calls and had not received this message until nearly evening. Hannah said Miss Lucy was in no pain. She was only very weak and tired. From these symptoms I knew that my patient was suffering from no other malady than old age. I knew, too, that the end was near.

Hannah met me at the door, asking me to go directly up to Miss Lucy's room. Hannah had left her only a minute before and now hurried away to the kitchen to prepare some warm broth for her patient.

IT WAS later afternoon of a damp, gray day in early February. As I softly opened the door to Miss Lucy's room, a ray of winter sunlight fell chillily across the faded carpet.

Instantly I stopped, frozen in the doorway with shock and amazement. What I saw was no trick of the wan winter sunlight, of that I was sure. For the merest fraction of a second there flashed before my vision the unmistakable forms of a small girl and boy. The boy's right hand clasped the left hand of the girl. Both children were dressed in the clothing of generations ago; the boy in knee breeches and velvet jacket with lace collar, while the girl wore a pinafore and her flaxen hair was done in two tight little pigtails. In that split second in which I glimpsed the figures, their backs were to me, and they were running to the window through which the rays of the last cheerless sunlight of the short winter day poured. I experienced an overpowering and unforgettable sense of revulsion as the figure of the little boy flitted before me. He was short and squat, and his body in some manner conveyed a hint of deformity without actually revealing any misshapeness. His child clothing somehow did not fit properly as it would a normal child. It was as though the garments were masking or cloaking some abnormality. His black hair hung lankly down his back, and around his head there seemed to hover a nimbus of evil. In his free hand the boy grasped an ancient stone hatchet—his plaything. It flashed through my mind that he was more of an imp or gargoyle than a human child. While my eyes blinked in amazement, the two visions winked out of existence like dancing motes in the sun's rays.

Shaken by this apparition more than I cared to confess, I turned after a moment to the bed. One glance told me that Miss Lucy was dead. She lay with her head turned to a peculiar angle, and her right arm thrown up across her forehead in a gesture curiously suggesting defense.

Reaching with one hand under her head to straighten it on the pillow, I removed her arm from her forehead with my other hand. As I did this, that happened which will haunt me until my dying day.

As I gently lifted Miss Lucy's arm from her forehead, thin trickles of blood descended like a red veil over her brow, and, as my other hand simultaneously sought the back of Miss Lucy's head, the long, fine filaments of her soft, silver hair and the delicate, parchment-thin scalp from which they grew came gently loose in my trembling hand.

A Sip With Satan

By ROGER S. VREELAND

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

THERE were times when our little home was the loveliest spot on earth. A sweet ramshackle homestead off a dirt road, away from town, and no close neighbors except old Everett Marlowe. Delia and I thought it was about perfect.

We had been there only a year. As for Marlowe, we didn't mind him. His property was next to ours, but his house, a four-story freak of stone block, was hidden—all but the slate roof—behind a thick wall of hemlock. Poor old Marlowe, we used to think. Just one old man alone in a place big enough for a hotel. During that first year the only times we ever saw him was when he puttered about in his garden of herbs.

I repeat, *there were times* when our home

A strange-looking garden . . . some of the plants were ordinary; but others were, well, just plain queer!

was lovely. But there were times when it was not. Not that Delia and I didn't get along. Nothing like that. We were in love. No, there was something else that at unpredictable intervals shadowed our life there. I wish I could explain it.

All I can say is this: The atmosphere would become heavy. Our spirits would sink. We would lie awake nights; become nervous. A heavy silence would fall over the place. If only a cricket would chirp; if only some water would drip, a mouse scratch.

Delia would whisper: "There is something surrounding us! What is it, George?"

I felt it, too, but it was six months before I admitted it.

These periods lasted two or three days, not to recur in as many weeks. At first I tried to think it was just the New England weather, but—well, there was no use pretending it didn't bother me. Between times, however, we forgot about it, and the dreary periods seemed like dull dreams.

We had moved there in October, when the place was bathed in a mellow glory on a rise that received the sun almost all the day. The oaks then were nearly bare, and the maples were golden. We had many fruit trees and berry bushes, but oddly there were no apples—save a few branches that hung over from Marlowe's property. No apple trees—that was all that I then had against the place.

HERE it was October again, and that apple tree of Marlowe's was loaded with the most delicious McIntoshes you could ever sink your teeth in. And my neighbor let those ruddy, sweet apples drop to the ground and rot!

This was what led to my first meeting with Everett Marlowe, for I was aggressive enough to go right over and tell him that if he didn't want those apples, I did.

I had to sort of weed him out of his garden of herbs. It was a strange-looking garden, and meticulously cared for. Some plants were plain, some exotic, others exceedingly queer. Marlowe was on his knees in the midst of yard-high bushes, plucking odd little turquoise berries into a tin cup. He didn't hear me at first. I had to shout. When he did look up, instead of being startled he merely smiled and said, "Hello, George."

Since I had never seen him before (one could never forget his face) for a moment I was set back. His appearance was definitely unpleasant, but his provincial drawl was friendly.

"Why shore, take 'em," he said. "I cain't eat 'em. Only got three tooth!"

The truth of this was conspicuous. It might be added that they were large and protruding. This first meeting was brief. I liked the old fellow, and I didn't. There was something repelling about him, not just that he was dirty and homely, but he had a manner that made me want to run and hide.

As for the apples, I gathered them all, and in the next few days my wife did up some applesauce. She suggested it would be nice to give him a few quarts. I hadn't told her of his negative effect upon me; didn't want to upset her. I took the jars over, knocked on his back door, and he opened it quickly. A cold musty draft hit me. He took the applesauce and thanked me with minimum ceremony.

Reciprocation was not what I expected, but Marlowe proved he had some neighborly spirit. I'll never forget the night he appeared at our kitchen door with a bulging brown bag in his hand. After inviting him in I was placed in extreme embarrassment by Delia, who was doing up the supper dishes.

This was the first time she had seen him at close range. She dropped a plate, put her hands to her face and uttered a shuddering cry. But I suppose it was natural for her to be startled, for his parched old face, uncouth beard and hair, those three teeth, and his gray lightless eyes composed a frightening sight.

But Marlowe took no notice. "It's good applesauce," he said. "I already et some."

He paused, fumbled with the bag.

"You're the first'ns to show me kindness in many years," he went on awkwardly. "Here's a l'l present for yuh," and he held forth the bag to Delia.

"It's herbs," he mumbled. "I grow 'em. Put 'em in a pot with some water and boil 'em. Makes good tea. Heh, heh, heh!" His voice was cracky under a forced laugh.

I thanked him and he left abruptly. I

threw the bag on a high shelf in the pantry and forgot about it.

NOW that we had lived here awhile, Delia and I began to cultivate friendships in the town, about a mile down the road. We joined the church and grew friendly with the minister and his wife. Delia joined the Ladies Aid, I the Men's Club. It was the old-fashioned kind of life we had always wanted.

Still, the cloud hung over. We never mentioned those awful spells to anyone. In fact it was a long time before we ever got around to even speaking of Everett Marlowe.

One thing in our relations with the townsfolk, however, we could not understand. None of them would ever come to visit us. There was always an excuse for us to go to their homes.

Thanksgiving passed. So did Christmas. We saw practically nothing of Marlowe—just his form, briefly, now and then, about his house. *But we could feel him.*

Then, on the night of January 29, there was a windy storm. I remember the date well. A fine sleet was glazing everything, and the wind was bending trees and snapping branches. Delia and I sat close to our hearth fire and close to each other, reading, looking up now and then as a dead limb crashed to the ground. The fine icy particles gritted against the windows, and at intervals volumes of them slapped at the panes furiously.

Delia arose several times to look out. Then, peering through the parted curtains, she said: "George, I saw someone swinging a lantern." I joined her and looked out to where the roadway wound up the hill toward the front of the house. I could see a few nearby trunks against the whitened ground, and a fine outline of the tree tops, but nothing else. Delia insisted, nevertheless, that she had seen a light.

We made an attempt to resume our reading, although we were both too nervous to concentrate. About ten minutes passed. Then, at a sound, we both jumped. It was barely audible, at first, but it unkeyed us. A knocking at the door!

Why should we be frightened by a mere knocking? It will be remembered that visitors were unknown to us. Besides that we were so tense that anything could frighten us.

It was a very feeble knocking, unrhythmical, like someone patting the door with a soft glove. I went quickly to the door, swung it open. There stood Everett Marlowe. The first thing I saw in the darkness was his three protruding teeth. But there was something very uncertain about him.

Delia uttered a short and high-pitched "Oh!" Then for a prolonged moment Marlowe and I faced each other in silence, while cold and sleet blew into the house. Common courtesy deserted me. The natural thing was for me to invite him in, yet I didn't want to.

Marlowe wavered. The brim of his hat concealed his eyes. He was covered with glistening sleet. Then in his thin cracked voice he said: "Can I come in?" He sounded pathetic, and I felt like a coward. At this point I began inwardly to recant. He was indeed gaunt and frightening in appearance, but I wondered if perhaps we had not been fools to think such weird things of him.

"Yes—come in," I said, and I closed the door behind his shuffling steps. Delia stood back, shaking. Marlowe stumbled to a chair and fell into it.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Marlowe?" I asked as steadily as possible.

He slouched forward and held his hands over his face.

"Make me some . . . tea, kindly," he muttered. "You still got some of my herbs, ain't yuh?"

"Yes, but what has brought you here?"

"Piece of tree blew down . . . hit me on head. Quick, fix some tea, you must . . . quick . . ." He groaned.

DELIA was still shaking, but she went to the kitchen and put on the kettle. I looked at Marlowe more closely now. His head and right shoulder were covered with chips of bark. His forehead was bruised. Then, as his head sank lower over his knees, I saw blood trickling down the back of his neck. He kept on muttering: "Quick . . . quick . . . just bring me my herbs . . . a cup . . . hot water . . . hurry . . . it's the only thing to save me. . . ."

He was, I now realized, hurt badly. First aid rather than herb tea was my first

thought,, so I called to Delia to get cotton and bandages, a basin, and to bring me the water as soon as it was hot.

"No! No!" he cried weakly. "Bring me my herbs first!"

His tea was prepared.

"Let me hold your hand, Delia, will yuh?" he murmured. "It's been so long—*so long* since a gentle hand has touched mine!"

She took his hand. Marlowe held it, squeezed it gradually—his bony, dirty hand enveloped the small soft one of Delia's. Then he picked up his cup of foolish tea and put it to his lips. Resentment had risen by bounds within me, but I couldn't speak or move. Whether the storm suddenly became quiet, or whether I just ceased hearing, I don't know. But, that dread silence and that indescribable feeling of depression was smothering me.

Marlowe sipped slowly, and closed his eyes. It must have been five minutes before he drained the cup—and he was very quiet. Finally the cup dropped from his fingers, fell to his lap, and the dregs dripped to the floor. As though someone were opening a door again to the outer world, the sound of the storm grew once more in my ears. Again the night howled.

Words can no longer serve to relate my feeling. O God, what a time! What an unholy event! The Prince of Darkness was presiding over my house, and I was alone. Complete terror possessed me during those few minutes. But I struggled to find my voice.

"Marlowe!" I yelled.

His face was the color of ashes. Marlowe was dead! I didn't merely suppose so. I knew it. He was dead. That in itself wasn't so bad. He was nothing to me. He was dead in my house—I could forget that.

But my wife! The look that came into her eyes shattered what was left of my nerves. She arose stiffly, looked at me with eyes I had never seen before, reached for the bag of herbs, calmly stepped across the room and walked out into the night. I was speechless.

First I glanced at the corpse of Everett Marlowe, then at the door Delia had closed behind her. All about me was haunting emptiness. Then with a surge of panic I ran for my lantern. I couldn't find it at first. When I did, my hand shook so that it was several moments before I could get it lighted. Without hat or coat, and with my lantern swinging at my side I ran out to find Delia. There were her footsteps in the snow, leading toward the road. I followed the best I could, while my hoarse cries in the storm seemed to die at their source, meek and futile. Straight down the road toward town they led, but the wind and falling snow was rapidly voiding them. Soon they were invisible, but I kept on until I came to the cluster of buildings comprising the town. All lights were out. But I got up Sheriff Mawson. We had been somewhat friendly. I guess he thought I was crazy. There wasn't much he could do then, but he made the effort.

The confusion, the storm, and my emotional state had made the night such a weird fantasy that I hardly remember what happened. I know that when the gray skies relightened I was simply obeying orders in an organized search for Delia. The snow had stopped, but the cold and the wind persisted. Removal of Marlowe's body had been managed without me. Although I was asked a lot of questions, apparently they were satisfied for the present that I was not involved in anything of a criminal nature.

Delia's disappearance, however, ended in a strange sequence to the already perplexing series of events. Word came that she had been found at an outlying farmhouse coincident with the disappearance there of the farmer's wife—a Mrs. Newcomb. Object of the search was then transferred to Mrs. Newcomb, and Delia, in a highly nervous state, was returned home. With her came Sheriff Mawson, the county physician and a handful of other tawdry, badge-breasted busy-bodies.

Delia was exhausted and dazed, although —so far as I could tell—entirely rational. I insisted that she be put to bed before further questioning. I made her some tea. Sight of the cup as I held it toward her brought a low cry from her lips. "Now I remember!" she whispered. "Mr. Marlowe was drinking his tea!"

"Of course, dear, but what happened after that? Why did you go out?"

"Go out?" She gazed at me searchingly.

Her eyes swept briefly the other faces in the room. "Go out?—I don't remember. I don't remember a thing after Mr. Marlowe drank his . . . his stuff, and held my hand."

WILBUR FISHER was an undertaker in the next community. Mrs. Newcomb was reported found by Mrs. Fisher in the living room of the latter's home when she had returned from a visit about 11 o'clock at night. Now Mr. Fisher was missing. The routine was established. The undertaker was discovered the following night at the home of a neighbor. An 18-year-old lad from that home was next on the missing list.

This went on for several days. Never was there an inkling as to who the next victim would be nor whence he would vanish. At first no serious harm befell any of these amnesia-like unfortunates. Then—one week after Marlowe's death and Delia's disappearance—the Reverend Cubberly was gone.

There were some particular details I had observed in connection with each disappearance, and I wondered if anyone else had noticed them. After much thought I decided to keep these observations to myself, and to follow them through in complete privacy. I didn't even tell Delia except in a very general way.

Resolving to visit the empty house of Everett Marlowe, I chose the next morning to do so. Sauntering from my back yard, past the apple trees, through a jungle of bare briars, and under the hemlocks, I came into the shadow of the big forlorn house. It was forbidding enough in summer, with a background of foliage to soften it. But now it stood mean and stark.

As I paced apprehensively through old Marlowe's herb garden, the overhang of the thick slate roof moved over me as though to crush me out. The black windows gave no evidence of what was within. The very walls of the house, lined with cracks and brown creepers of ivy, frowned down at me. I paused curiously over herb brush bearing winter berries, and noticed green leaves under protective balls of glass.

Mounting the back stoop, I was surprised that the old boards didn't crumple with my weight. The stoop itself sagged away from the stone of the main structure, and warped wooden embellishment hung loose from the eaves. The door was massive enough for the main portal of a fine house. It pushed open easily.

The odor of the place was at once sickening. Mustiness, sour plaster, and stale food mingled with other smells. A short corridor led to the kitchen, apparently the room Marlowe had lived in, for it contained a cot with a pile of dirty blankets, a table with unwashed dishes, food leftover, a wood-cooking stove, stack of kindling, pots and utensils, and in a dark corner a sink and handpump. The house had been built for elegant living of its day, but decadency had ruled for many years.

I moved slowly through other rooms on the first floor. They were mostly bare. A few pieces of old dusty furniture stood here and there. Probably Marlowe had chopped up the original furnishings for his stove. Little by little, I imagined, he had stripped the house of things which must have been beautiful and costly. Outlines on the walls showed where paintings had hung, where massive pieces of furniture had stood. All the rooms were gloomy, considering it was a bright morning, until I came to a wide and handsome drawing room. Here light flooded through an immense bay window, onto a sprawling array of plants—more herbs—growing in flower pots and boxes. The floor was a mess from where he had watered them and spilled earth.

Even though I had had no association with the place, no reason for sentiment, something choked me as I went up the grand stairway. It was this desolate emptiness all around in a place that had been built for gaiety, where the warmth of human sociality once had pulsed so strong, and now was a mausoleum for dead memories. Statuary, porcelain, glass and iron ornaments—cold symbols of a past—stood about to haunt the silence. They alone survived, I suppose, because Marlowe couldn't burn them in his kitchen stove. Everett Marlowe—miserable wretch—scion of a proud family—what curse had left him to survive alone in these ruins?

Through the rooms of the second floor and the third floor I moved. They were

just empty rooms—only bits of evidence were here and there of the luxuries they had once known. Now that I was in the house it seemed even higher than I realized. And there was yet a fourth floor. As I approached this, up less impressive stairs, the first floor and kitchen seemed remote indeed.

Reaching a semi-circular landing I faced a fanlike arrangements of closed doors. Nearing the end of my inspection, disappointment was growing because I hadn't found what I specifically sought. Beginning at the left, I opened the doors methodically. There were small rooms, probably for servants. But upon opening the last door I faced surprise.

This room, much larger than the other, was completely furnished and had been much used. A glance and I knew that this was what I had been looking for. There were the untidy signs of work always a step ahead of orderliness. The floor was carpeted, there were comfortable chairs; shelves lined with books filled one wall, and a great cabinet containing hundreds of bottles occupied the other side. The central piece of furniture, however, was an old-fashioned rolltop desk. It was open, and on it stood an oil lamp and a brown book.

This, specifically the book, was what I hoped I might find. I picked it up, and the brown of its aged covering came off powdery in my hands. The pages were dark and brittle. It had been exactingly bound, and every word in it was hand inscribed. Then I looked at the titles on the shelves, read the labels on the bottles. All confirmed what I anticipated.

I DEPARTED then, with the book under my arm. When I got home Delia was at the door, and her white face was enough to warn me that something was especially wrong.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Don't speak yet."

I carried the book to my room, locked it in my dresser. I washed my hands. When I returned my wife was standing in the living room, her hand to her forehead.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Mr. Cubberly is dead."

My stomach sank. "Tell me," I urged.

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"He was found lying on the kitchen floor—strangled."

"Great heavens!" I choked. "Well, at least we'll get state—perhaps federal authorities in here now. He was dead when they found him?"

Delia nodded.

"Anyone missing now?"

Again she nodded. "Mrs. Cubberly!"

At this stage I decided to get Delia away from all this. I went to town, telegraphed my brother in the city, waited for reply, and put my wife on the next train. She hadn't needed much coaxing to go, though she wanted me to go with her. I promised to join her in a few days.

The murder brought a small crowd of newspapermen and detectives to the community. Evading them, I went home, got the book, and delved into a subject unfit for any mortal to read. I destroyed the book, finally, but I cannot destroy my memory. What hideous mind of the past concocted it, whence he obtained his information, I had no way of knowing, but of the latter I can surmise. It was difficult at first to attack reality to the carefully penned, carefully preserved scripts. The language was old, the spelling obsolete, and there were phrases in Latin, German, and Greek. Though I hurried through some portions, my attention pursued one idea, one train of thought, and the clue I sought slowly unraveled itself.

A new enigma surprised the community the next day when Mrs. Cubberly, the minister's wife, failed to return; and equal surprise when no report came of another disappearance. Although Mrs. Cubberly remained vanished, new disappearances ceased. Gradually the town began to breathe more easily.

Delia wanted to return, but I insisted that she remain away until spring. I was convinced that the evil spirit hovering over us had not departed permanently, that one day before summer we would awake to a new shock.

The winter lingered. I was not only lonesome but extremely ill at ease. I subscribed to a city newspaper, however, and began a little hobby. It was to collect certain small items I discovered I could find in the paper every few days. They came from various

parts of the country, didn't rate much importance in the city paper—which used them chiefly as fillers.

These were notes of human disappearances, in most cases attributed to amnesia, such as are seen frequently in any paper. Particular items I filed separately. Now I discovered that if a line were drawn on a map through the places from which they were date-lined, a definite geographic contour would result.

Early in May the line pointed directly our way, though still hundreds of miles distant. I grew excited. Later the towns became closer together and much nearer. And for the first time the papers carried a general story on a series of amnesia cases, at the same time recalling the events of months earlier in our community.

ONE moonlight night my vigil at the Marlowe mansion was rewarded. I saw something move near the corner of the house. I tried to stop breathing as I saw the figure of a small man move out into the moonlight. I jammed my pipe into my pocket and crouched into the deepest shadow possible.

As well as I knew that Everett Marlowe had died and been buried, I knew also that *this* man was Everett Marlowe. He passed very close to me. He stopped now and then to look around, as though spotting familiar things. I was afraid he would see me. Finally he moved toward one of those glass bells under which he grew strange plants. He lifted the glass and felt some berries. Then he kneeled before the plant and spent four or five minutes picking the berries and dropping them into an envelope. He went through the same procedure at several other bushes, then went into the house.

I saw light flickering through the windows. I knew what he was doing. I knew he was preparing his herbs. I waited, then walked to the door.

"Come out, Everett Marlowe!" I called.

I heard uncertain steps shuffling and gritting on the boards. In a moment the man appeared in the doorway. He didn't look quite like the Marlowe I knew. I didn't see those three teeth. The face wasn't so withered. But—those same lightless eyes!

"Who are you?" came a dull voice.

"You should know *me*," I replied.

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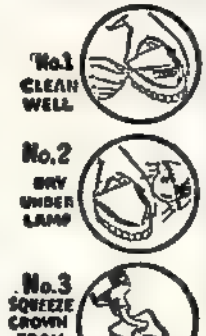

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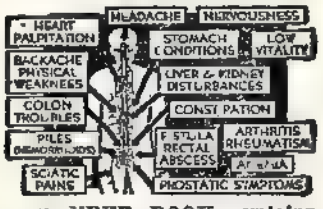

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He came slowly toward me. *He did know me.* "Get out of here, George!" he said menacingly.

"You'll not drink your brew tonight," I said audaciously. "Marlowe, you will die tonight. You have come to the end of your unnatural roamings, spreading misery and death."

"You know too much." He didn't speak with that colloquial drawl of former times. Clumsily, but steadily, he continued coming toward me.

"Is your tea ready yet?" I asked. "Not that I care to partake of your hospitality!" How he took me so off guard is beyond me. But he made a lurch—his fist struck my temple, and I fell to the ground dazed. When I tried to get up he hit me again. In a few moments he had me bound, dragged me into his kitchen. He tied me to a chair, carefully not too secure and he allowed my arms free. Then with some concern he put a wet cloth to my face and forced whiskey down my throat. All this was through no pity for me. When he was sure I was all right, and that I was secure, he went back to his work.

Small heaps of dried leaves and berries were spread over the table. A pan of water was heating. He became very occupied, but every few minutes glanced toward me nervously. After studying his little piles at great length, making corrections, carefully sorting out little pieces, he dumped them into a large bag, added some powders, and shook the bag vigorously. Then he withdrew some and dropped it into the boiling water.

I was thoroughly frightened. I knew what he intended to do with me, and that if he succeeded I would be dead at the end of another 24 hours. Finally he spoke: "Why do you call me Marlowe?" he asked. "Do I look like the man you knew?"

"No. But you succeeded well in finding a man who resembled your former self. And as you planned to return here, you thought it might help in case anyone saw you. Is that right? Well, I'll give you credit for a fair job at makeup."

"You really have been nebbing into my affairs, haven't you!" he growled. "And I suppose you know what's going to happen to you—now?"

"I know what you would *like*—the same as happened to my wife. Or I might better say, as happened to Mr. Cubberly. You took no chances with him, did you. . . ."

"Ha!" he grimaced. "So you know about him, too! And do you think you can stop me now?"

"You are already stopped—and don't know it!" I blurted out in an angry bluff.

"No-o-o-o!" he cried in muffled but confident tone. A scowl crossed his face—a scowl of demoniac triumph, of wicked exultation. "I shall never die! I have but begun to live. While now I must live but from day to day, my mind and spirit as one, leaping from one human to another, as a man leaping precariously across a stream from one stepping stone to the next, soon I will have perfected a way to extend the effect of each . . . ha! . . . you know about that, too? Well, soon I will not live only from one night to the next, but until the next full moon reaches its zenith.

"Ah!" he went on. "The ways of Satan are subtle. The longer you serve Him the more confidence He places in you, the more of His secrets He divulges."

"So it was Satan," I said, egging him on, "Who gave you that evil book that was in your fourth-floor study?"

Marlowe turned toward me fiercely. Deep in his dull lifeless eyes I saw waxing a lurid glow. "What do you know of a book of mine?" he demanded in savage guttural.

"Much!" I returned. "I have the book—I have read it from cover to cover—and when you're dead, I shall burn it page by page!"

"Where is it!" he demanded, fury and fear mingled.

"Where neither you nor anyone else shall ever find it."

His fingers worked as if in anticipation of reaching for my throat. "I would kill you now—if I didn't need you. . . ."

"Yes, I understand."

He turned, disgustedly. Impatiently he removed the pan from the stove and began pouring the contents in a glass. This was my deadline for action. Desperately I reached into my pockets. The best I could find was my pipe. Hurling it at him, I knocked the glass to the floor. Then with sudden and great effort I pushed myself

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forward and tried to stand. Wood in the chair snapped. I was on my feet, but the broken chair was still tied to me. Marlowe rushed toward me. I wheeled about timing it so that he fell against the chair, and the force nearly knocked me down, too. Grabbing the first thing I saw—a shovel leaning against the wall—and without taking time to aim, I swung it around. The flat of it caught Marlowe against the head. He staggered, dropped to his elbow, giving me a vital moment to disentangle myself from the broken chair.

Without wasting time I repeated the tactics he had used earlier on me. I searched for something secure. A vertical pipe ran through the room close to the wall. I tied him to this, using what pieces of cord I could find, and strips which I tore from his shirt. After he was secure I threw out the remainder of the baneful brew.

The hour I judged was about 10:30—which meant one-and-a-half hours until the ominous moment of midnight. Marlowe's senses returned shortly. For a while he was sullen. Then he tried to break loose—without success.

But he moaned and he writhed, and twisted his face. With strange words and incantations he petitioned the Devil. The air trembled with the unholy imprecations that spilled from his mouth. He blasphemed the Devil until he choked for breath; then he blasphemed God. The last time I looked at him his face was black and his tongue protruding, swollen and green.

Finally he was silent for a few seconds. Then in a rasping, though more rational voice—but uncompromising—he begged: "George! my tea . . . git it to me or I'll loose every curse upon you I have ever learned! *George!*"

I backed away, raised my arm to hide my face. Marlowe shrieked an unspellable word—then lapsed into a continued wail that rose and fell with a chill more penetrating than that of a mourning hound. Marlowe had gone mad.

The room was murky with a greenish vapor. The yellow light from Marlowe's lamp was all but stuffed out. What evil forces were contending I could not know. But of this I was sure: I was alone in an existence dominated by another dimension.

It must have been within a very few minutes of midnight. Marlowe shrieked like a tormented loon. I felt my own sanity being put to the test. The house from its foundations vibrated as if to the discord of great organ pipes of the deepest pitch.

I could stand it no longer. I ran out into the open. The moonlight and lighter air were a relief for a moment. I looked up to the moon—in time to see it blotted out by a sudden dense cloud. Darkness engulfed me, everything—everything except the house. I turned toward that awful edifice of evil—whence the weird screaming of Marlowe came unabated. A green aura was giving off from the building, the same sickening hue I had seen inside. It palpitated slowly, like the pulse of some gruesome organism.

Suddenly there was a rushing of wind, accompanied by a thousand tiny singing voices, like a conglomeration of sharps and flats plucked from the highest strings of a harp. With it came a shrouding blackness, sweeping toward the house from all sides as though bursting in to fill a void. Before it was merely dark. But this was the blackness of chaos. It even snuffed out the green luminosity of the house. And for a moment I lost all sense of feeling.

Marlowe's screaming stopped abruptly.

I ALONE knew that the curse of our community now was lifted; that Everett Marlowe never really had died until this moment. I alone knew that there was a man in there, where I left Marlowe, slowly returning to consciousness, who soon would wonder where he was, what had happened to him.

And I alone knew the ancient sorcerer's secret that Marlowe had invoked through the wicked concoction of his brew of herbs, the nocuous recipe and its sinister consequences—its drug potency that could permeate the very seat of life to separate the metaphysical threads that bind body and soul. Only I knew that this elixir could thus, at the culmination of its alchemical power, literally free spirit from body; that the liquid a moment after being consumed could empower the drinker, through his mere touching of another person, to transfer his spirit to the other body where it could overpower and subdue the victim spirit. And

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I had learned, of course, that this was why Marlowe had wanted to hold my wife's hand while he drank the tea that awful night.

Yes, I had learned *so much* since that night!

Now—as I stood before the invisible house—the air screamed all about me, there was a quality reminiscent of that night. So, I waited—and waited—the only mortal aware of the forces that had been battling hereabout the natural order of things.

True, there was a catch to Marlowe's evil trick—one that he had sought to overcome. The power of one draft of his brew was limited until the next sun-at-nadir. If after sundown the parasite spirit did not transfer to another body, he was doomed to die at midnight.

Had Marlowe ever availed himself of his power previous to the time he was forced to —so desperately—when he borrowed the body of my wife? That is unanswerable. But since then I now had the evidence that he had gotten his unnatural existence down to a good system.

But now, awaiting the end of the sinister demonstration the blackness and suspense continued.

Heaven and hell may have been contending for this spot of earth. I might not live to see the light of another day. But no—it all ended very suddenly. The moon broke forth again, and the air turned clean and fresh, and the bigness of the house once more loomed before me. For a moment I couldn't move. It seemed as though I had to wait for my blood to recommence its circulation.

Determined, and at the same time timid, I went back into the house. I felt along the damp walls of the hallway until I reached the open door to the kitchen. A great square of moonlight beamed through a window, onto the place where I had left the man who had been the temporary Everett Marlowe.

The form was heaped over, but it stirred.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

A mild groan.

I freed him and he tottered uncertainly. "Where am I?" he queried dazedly.

Whoever he was, he would find out, but never *why!*

Not Beast Nor Man

FOR sometime we have pestered Manly Wade Wellman for more information about that "Myth" that may not be a myth, the one concerning the Shonokins.

Manly Wellman is taking his own time to reveal the sinister nature and macabre ambitions of the Shonokins through the eyes and experiences of John Thunstone.

However, he did pass along the following to us:

To those who have been kind enough to ask for "real information" on the Shonokins, I can only point to the very, very meager dossier that Thunstone himself reveals in the current account. The few beside Thunstone who have ever heard of the Shonokins by name are apt to dismiss them as a "myth."

The only people who know the truth about them died many thousands of years ago.

Our ancestors who fought before history's dawn against creatures that were not beast nor man settled the greatest war question of all time when they established the rule of their descendants on Earth—but whether they settled that question eternally remains to be seen. We know only what happened in Europe, the one continent where paleontologists have made a fairly thorough study of remains. What about America—Asia—other places where the beaten but perhaps not obliterated race of the enemy gathered and prepared—and may be now organizing for a return battle?

But if the Shonokins are dangerous, we are dangerous to them. Thunstone has fought no more than the early minor skirmishes before the decisive engagement.

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Lured from "Retirement!"

SOME months ago we got a several-page letter in our offices commenting on WEIRD TALES and its contributors. At the end the author, Jack Snow, modestly admitted that he had once sold two little shorts to WEIRD, in 1927 and 1928. Naturally our curiosity was aroused, we looked him up and found him ensconced just across the street from us (literally), a writer with the National Broadcasting Company.

In the course of subsequent conversations we said half-humorously that since he knew so much about "weird" tales (he really does) why didn't he sit down and write one? Which is just what he did and the result—well, you've read, or will read, "Second Childhood" yourself.

Here is what Mr. Snow has to say about himself:

Earliest memory goes back to a day before I could walk or talk when my grandfather, a dentist, fascinated me with a saucerful of quicksilver. A little later I used to watch for the ice-cream wagon which appeared each afternoon rolling down the street from a point three blocks distant, where I could dimly discern a pole—the North Pole then, and logical origin of the ice-cream man. Later it became a barber pole. Life has been like that ever since.

In early 1920's worried family to death by clambering over the roof erecting radio antennae. Began writing a radio review column for a newspaper while attending Central High School at Piqua, Ohio—hometown I proudly share with the Mills Brothers and ace Don Gentile. Sold two shorts to WEIRD TALES several years later and have not missed reading more than a half-dozen issues of the magazine

READERS' VOTE

LORDS OF THE GHOSTLANDS	ALANNAH
IN THE BEGINNING	A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR TOMMY
THE PERIPATETIC CORPSE	THE SHOJOKINS
PLEASE GO WAY AND LET ME SLEEP	THE TOMBSTONE
	SECOND CHILDHOOD
	A SIP WITH SATAN

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3, respectively, against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

WEIRD TALES

9 Rockefeller Plaza New York City

since its inception. Worked for various radio stations, landing at NBC in 1943 after fourteen months in the Army. A lifelong admirer of L. Frank Baum and his Oz books, I have a huge collection of first editions and have gathered photographs, scrap books, personal letters, etc., which will become a part of a forthcoming Baum biography. Have written a new Oz book, now published, and hope to do one each year in the Baum tradition. Favorite authors are: Baum, Walter de la Mare, Arthur Machen, Frank Owen, Seabury Quinn and Ray Bradbury.

Jack Snow

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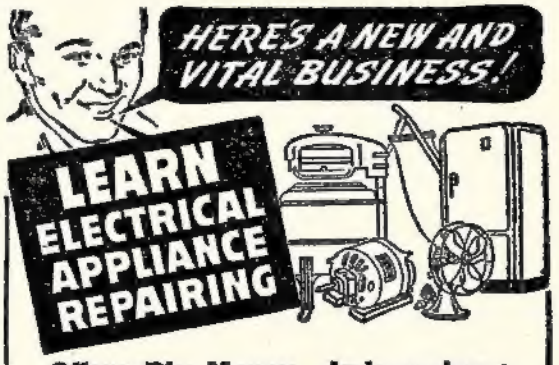

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